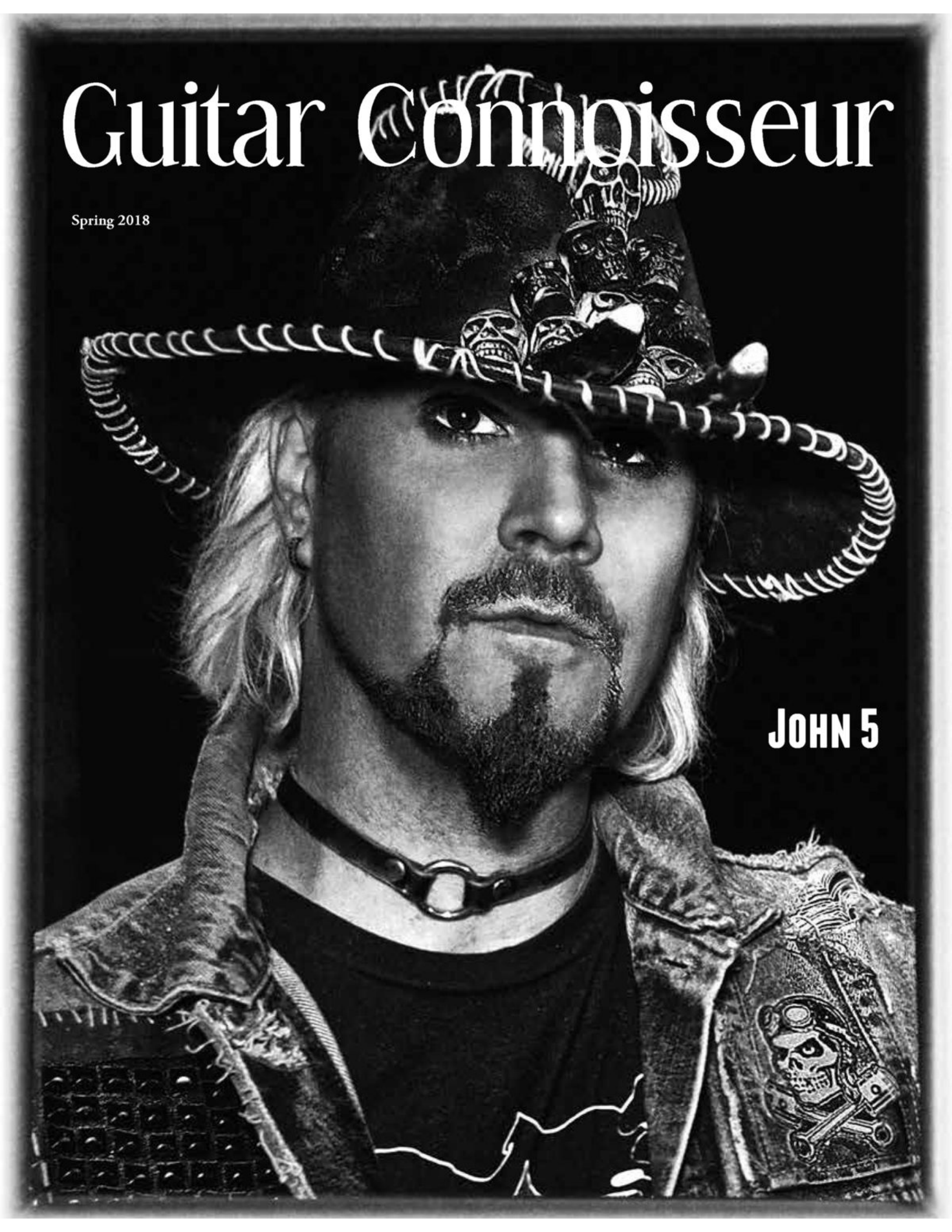
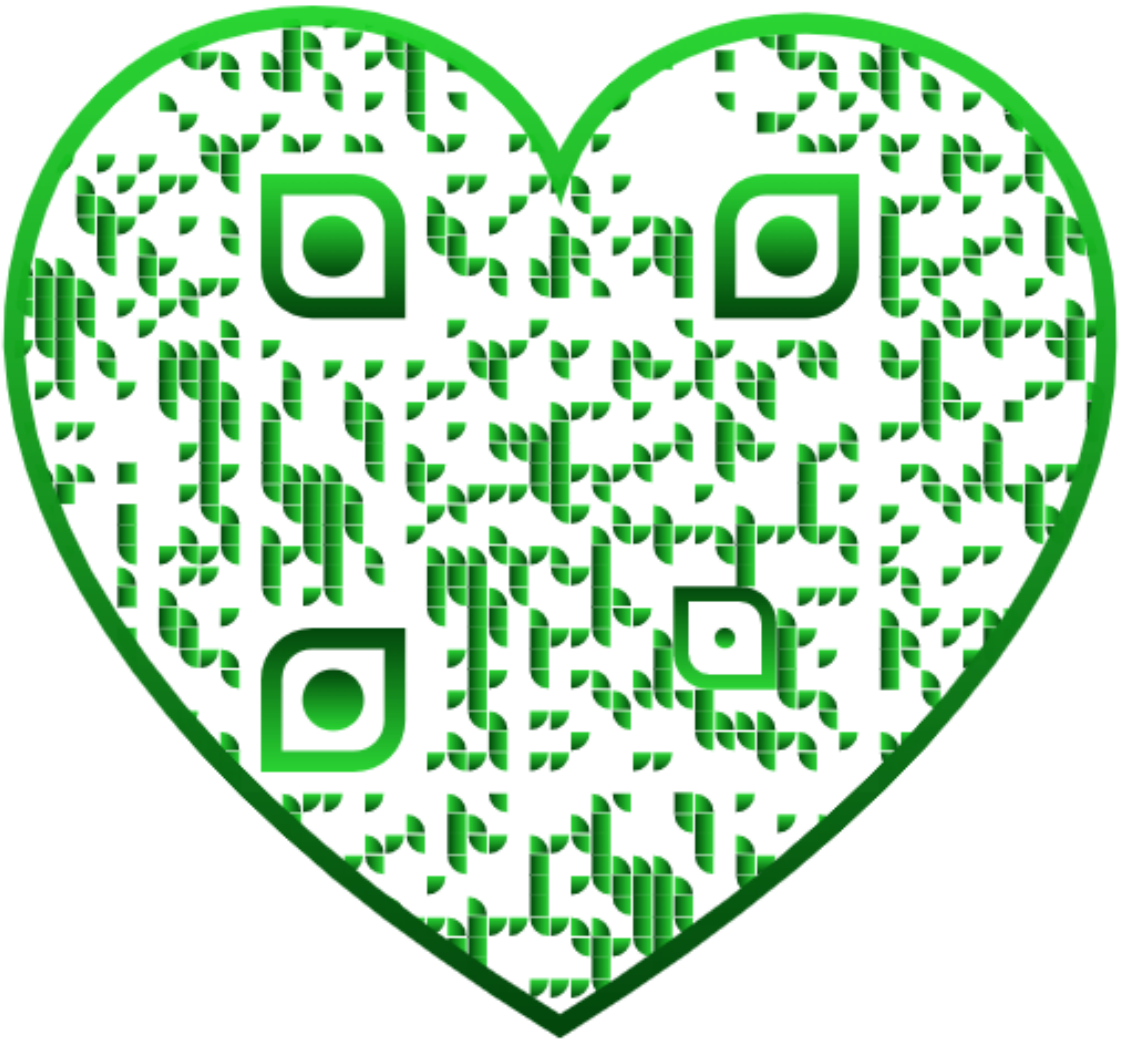
Guitar Connoisseur

Spring 2018



JOHN 5



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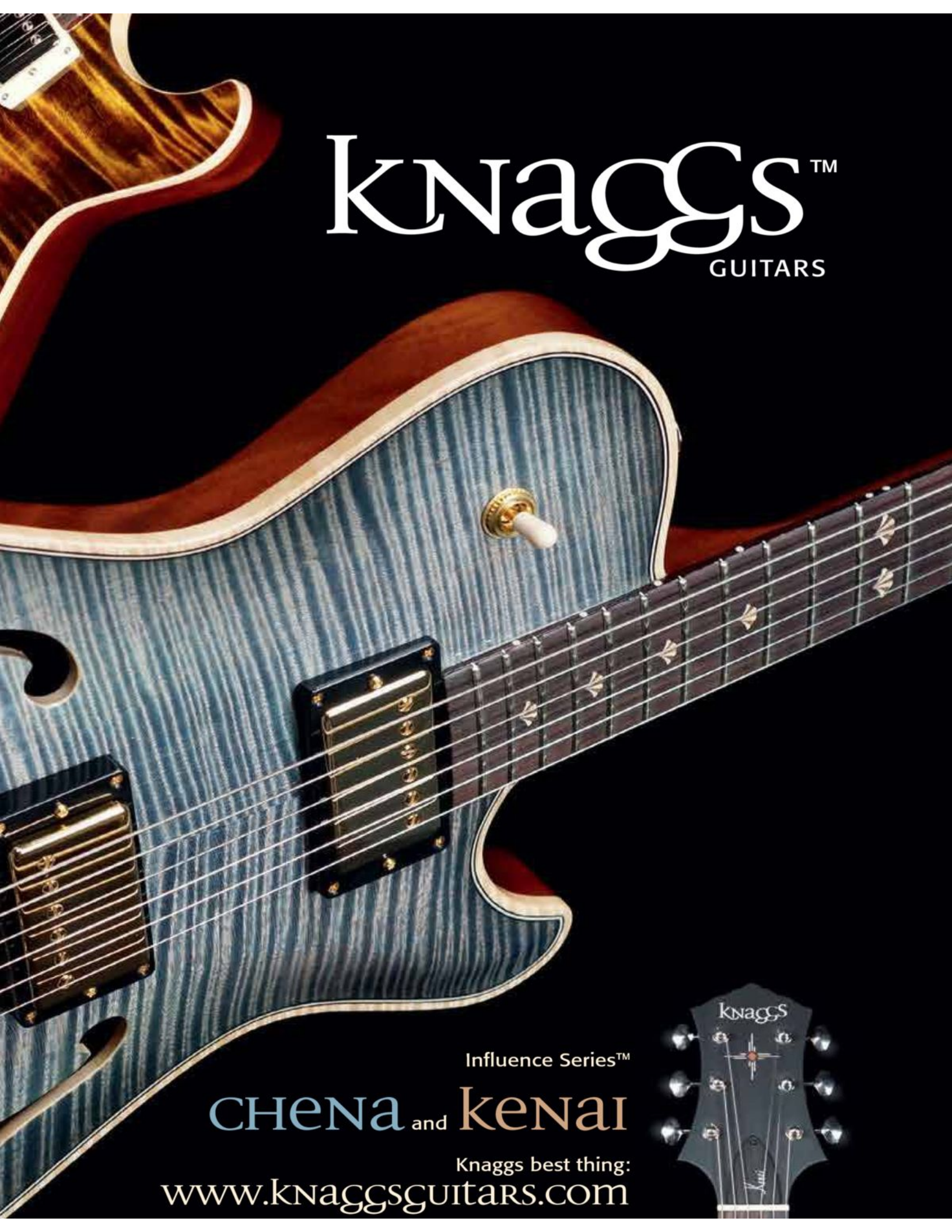

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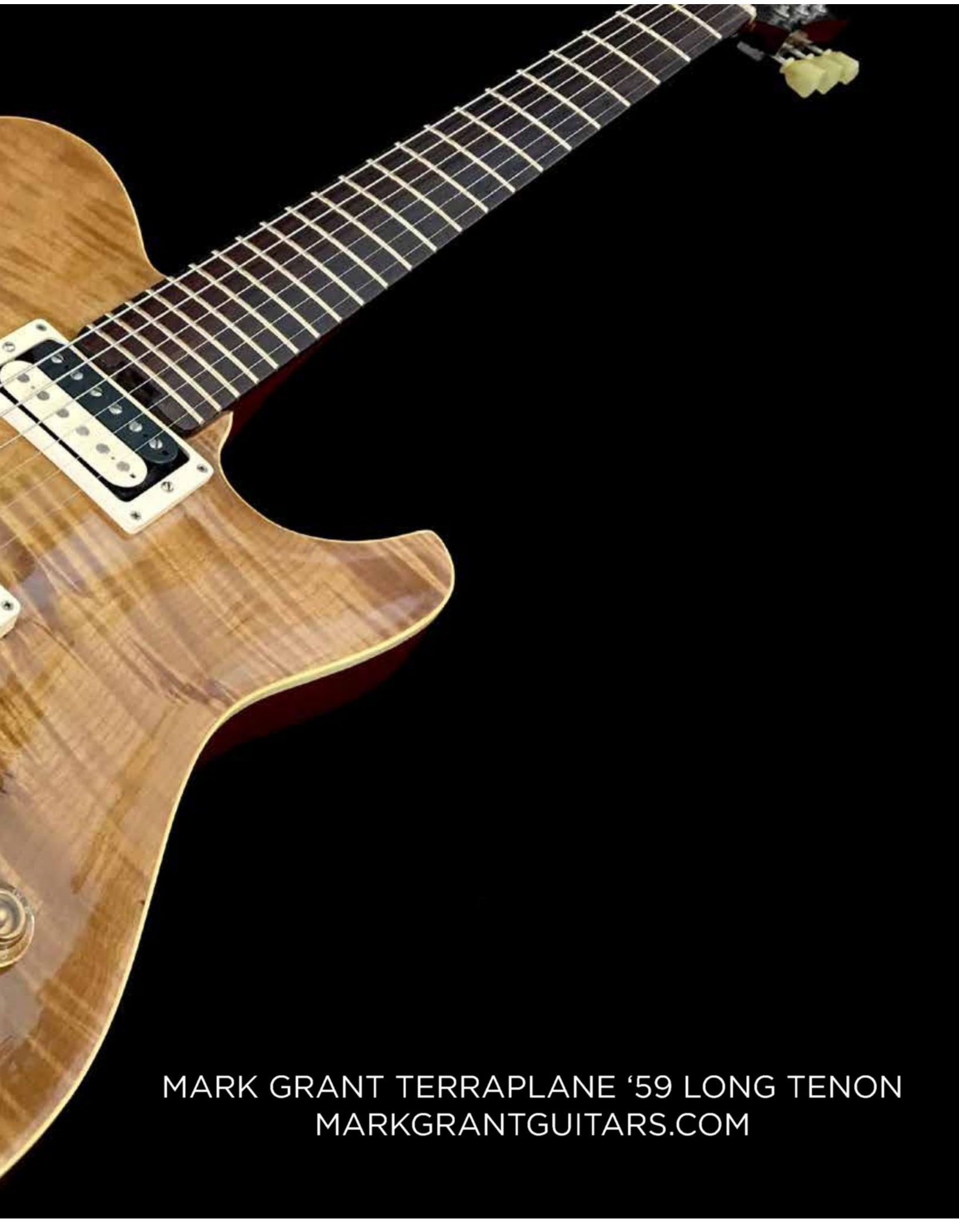

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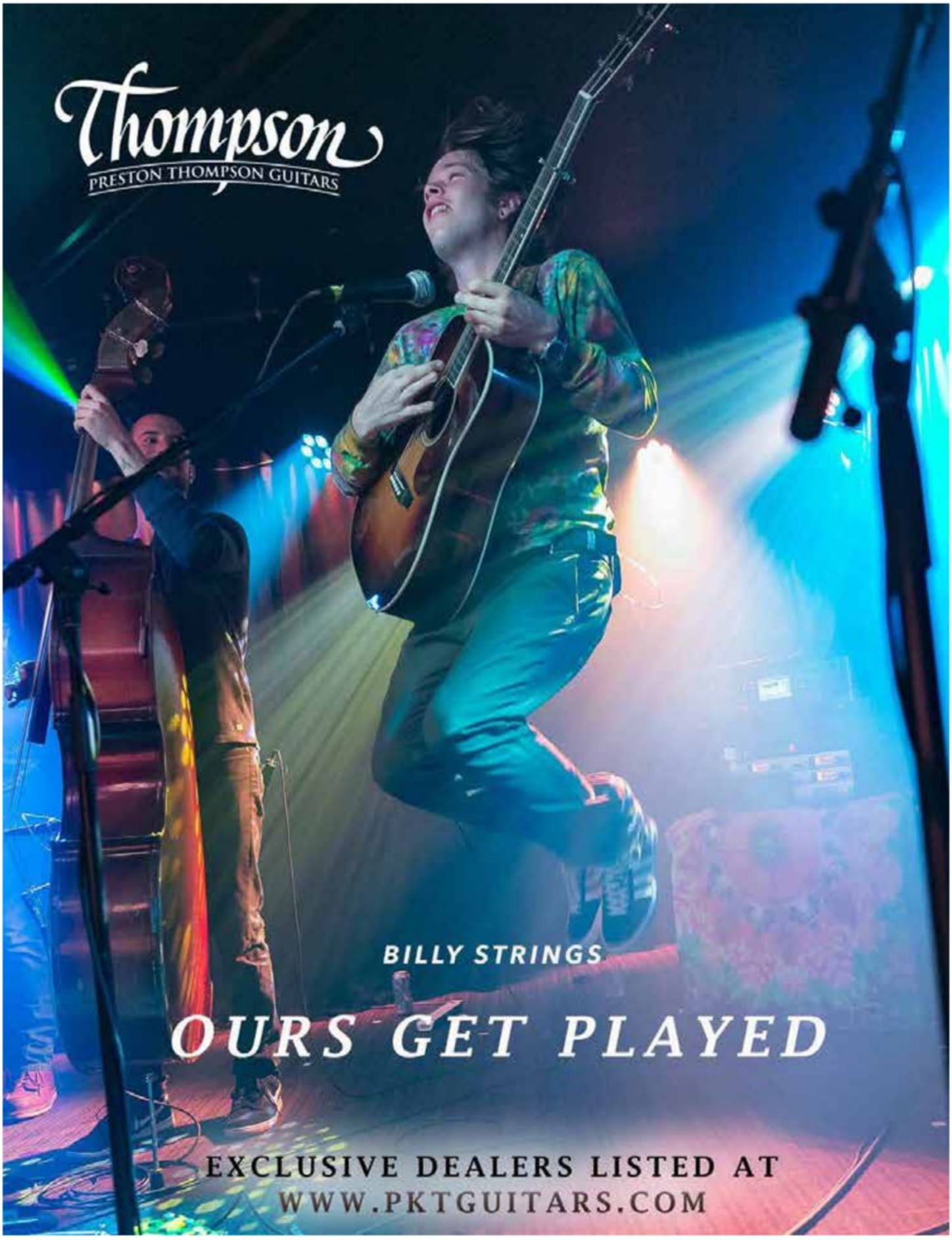
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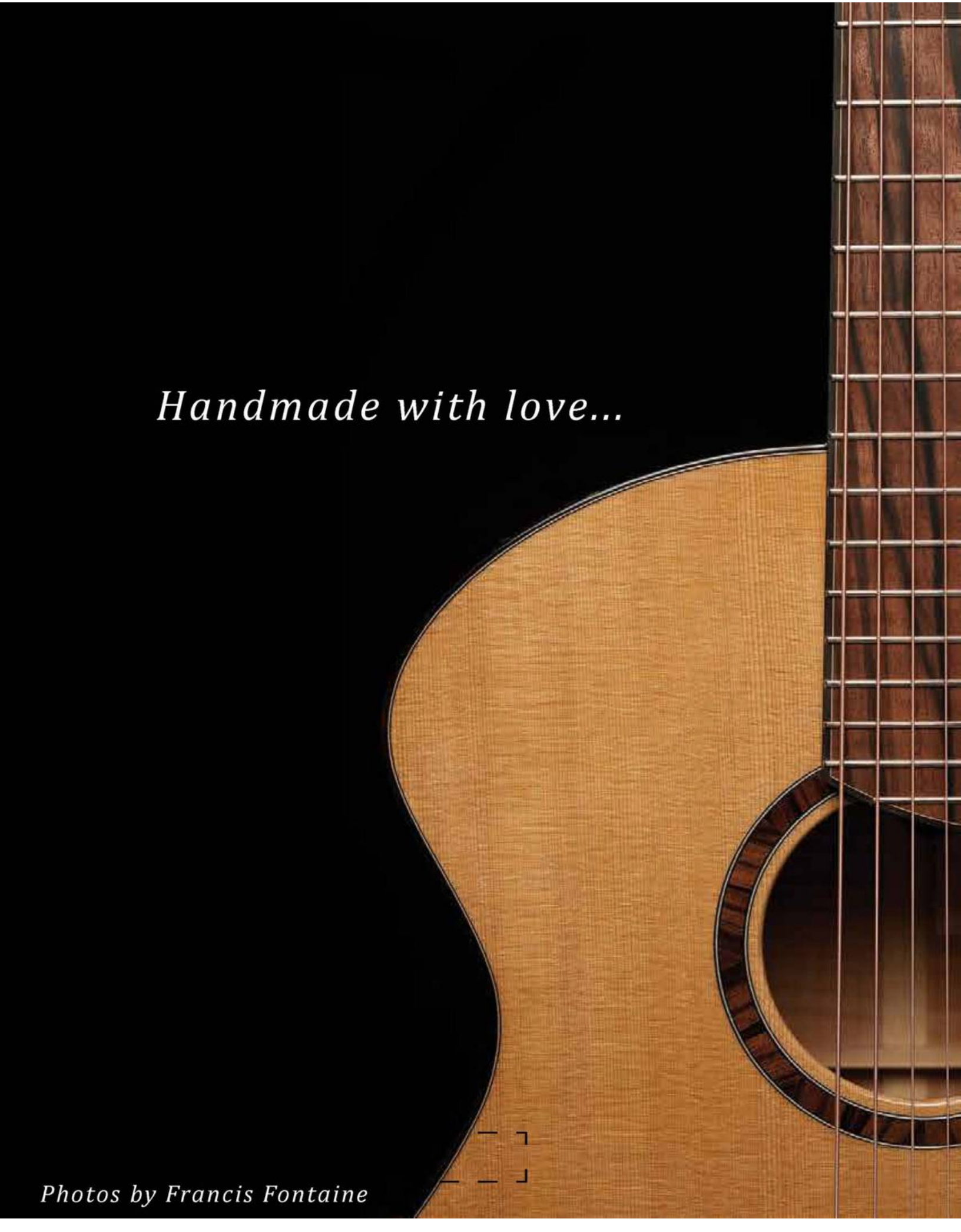
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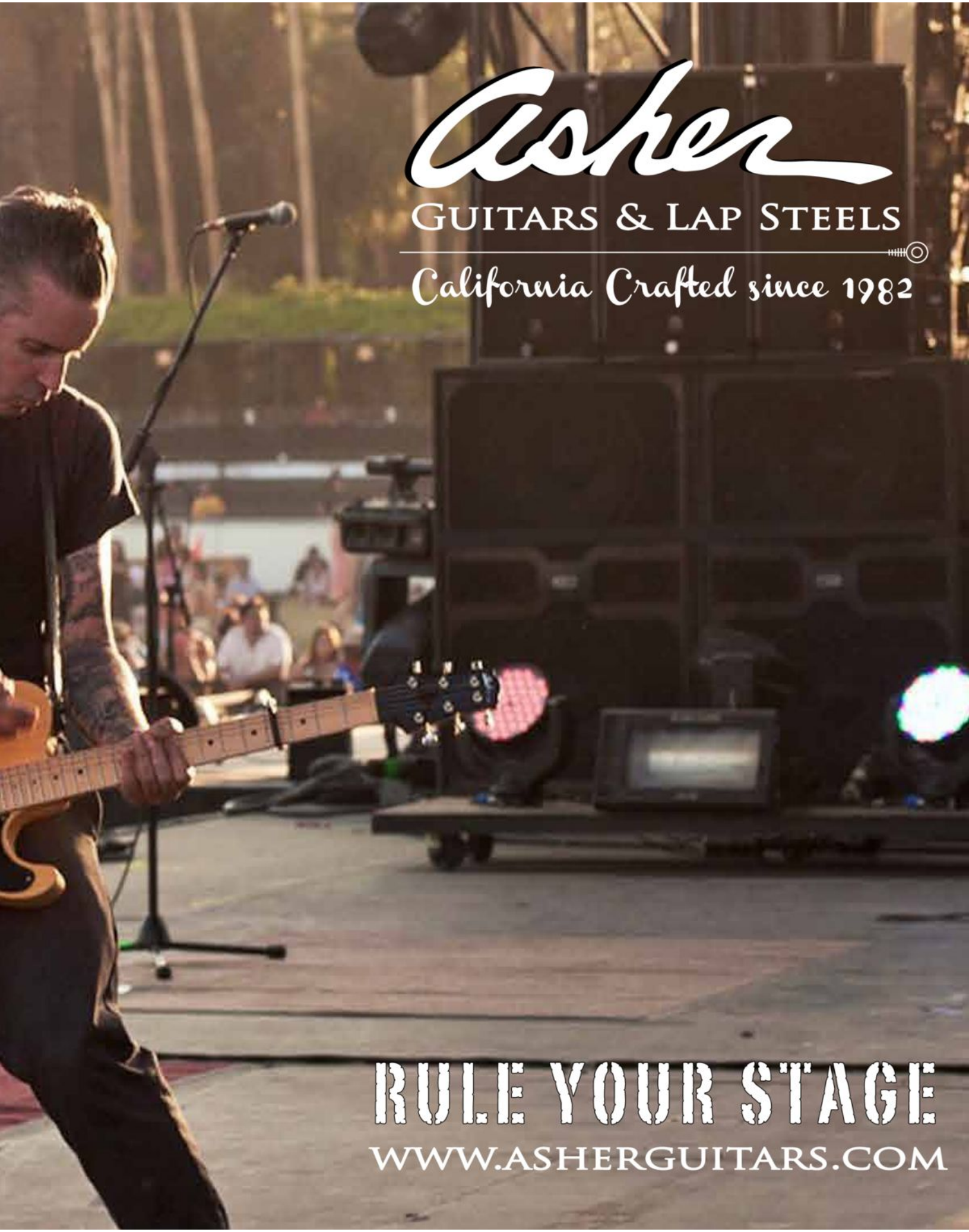
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KELCEY ALONZO

Founder/Editor in Chief at Guitar Connoisseur

Kelcey Alonzo is a New York City based guitar collector and player. Prior to establishing a small exclusive boutique instrument business; leading into the publishing of Guitar Connoisseur, Alonzo worked full time in the print media industry, specializing in photo retouching for leading fashion magazines. Channeling this expertise into the creation of a sophisticated periodical, celebrating contemporary craft luthiery is the realization of a dream.

PASQUALE "PAT" BIANCULLI

Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Born and raised in Brooklyn NY, Pasquale "Pat" Bianculli, studied classical guitar with Jerry Willard and Edgard Dana, at the Guitar Workshop in Oyster Bay, NY. He received his M. Mus. degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1981. The same year, he had the honor of performing for the legendary guitarist, Andres Segovia, in Granada, Spain. As a recitalist, he has been heard across the U.S., Canada, Europe and the Caribbean. In 1983, he made his New York solo debut at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Both he and his wife, flutist, Kathy McDonald, have shared music teaching careers, and continue to consult as well as record and perform their own works.

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CHRIS WYNNE

Luthier and Founder of Thomas Lloyd Guitars &
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Having been involved in music for the last 40 years, (23 years as a guitar builder), Master Luthier Chris Wynne draws on a wealth of knowledge not only as a player, but having recorded over 6 albums. Touring the east coast of Australia with performances at the Sydney Opera House, Chris has also taught guitar playing for many years, teaching many different styles of music. He is now one of the most sought after guitar making teachers in Australia.

thomaslloydguitarstlg.com.au

GREG JONES

Drummer/Songwriter/Coffee Expert

Greg Jones is a songwriter and drummer with a flair for doing things differently. His progressive rock band PINNACLE has played at music festivals and theaters, opened for Spock's Beard and Riverside and served as backing band for Nick D'Virgilio at a concert on his first solo tour. He is also an avid music fan, once traveling 6,000 miles one way just to see a band in concert. He is also a world-reknowned coffee expert and author of the upcoming book No Ordinary Joe. His favorite instrument of all? The electric guitar.

http://pinnacleband.com/

AMAN KHOSLA

Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Aman is a guitar player, composer, producer, and now quirky contributor to Guitar Connoisseur. Having grown up across the world he calls India, Singapore, Australia and the US home, and has a unique musical language to call his own because of it. Currently based in New York City, Aman is an independent artist and touring musician, and also the ongoing music director for Ashish Chandola Wildlife, guitar player for US-based British band 'DMG' and happily a stomping Morley Pedals endorser. Proceed with caution.

www.amankhosla.com

STEVE RIDER

Columnist/Luthier

Steve is an avid student of science, philosophy, and history, also pursuing art and writing as hobbies from a young age. He began playing the guitar at 14 years of age and has had a relationship with it ever since. After spending years studying and working in scientific fields such as molecular biology and nuclear medicine technology, Steve was left unsatisfied. He decided to leave the corporate and healthcare worlds behind in a search for happiness and independence. After starting several businesses, he became involved in the craft of guitar building, learning woodworking, electronics, and finishing from the ground up. His passion for the art of constructing electric guitars has grown ever more intense and in 2015 he founded SJR Custom Guitars in order to realize a lifelong ambition of combining livelihood and creativity.

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DAVID BARRETT

Columnist/Pro Musician

David Barrett is a Canadian instrumental guitarist who in 2010 formed the David Barrett Trio. Their first self titled album was produced by Alex Lifeson, Alan Parsons, and Richard Chycki. They collaborated again with Lifeson, as well as Canadian prog icon Michael Sadler and Celtic guitar virtuoso Tony McManus, on their second studio album David Barrett Trio II. A Whisper To Thunder - David Barrett Trio Live In Concert, is the bands current release, a live DVD. In addition to the trio, Barrett produces instrumental guitar albums, performs solo concerts throughout Canada, and hosts the annual Guitar Summit at Ravenswood, a northern retreat in Bobcaygeon, Ontario. David is an endorsing artist for innovative companies such as D'Addario/Planet Waves, Pigtronix Futuristic Audio Technology, Mack Boutique Guitar Amps, and Dagmar Custom Guitars.

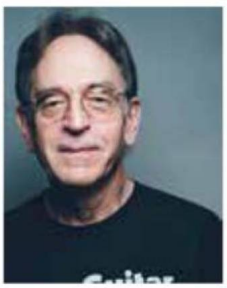
www.davidbarretttrio.com

ROD DEGEORGE

Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Rod DeGeorge is a guitar teacher, live performer and highly prolific session musician. He has written, recorded and produced commercial jingles and compositions for several national ad campaigns and other television projects. Rod has shared the stage with various well known musicians as a sideman. As a composer he has also released solo material, and was featured by Guitar Player Magazine, reviewing the title track of his Cosmic Playground instrumental album. As a teacher, Rod developed "Future of Music", an educational program which received praise and support from The United Way.

www.degeorgemusic.com



JAS OBRECHT

Music Journalist

Jas Obrecht is an award-winning music journalist and former editor of Guitar Player magazine. He has written for Rolling Stone, Living Blues, Blues Revue, and many other publications. His books include Rollin' and Tumblin': The Postwar Blues Guitarists and Blues Guitar: The Men Who Made the Music.

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Editor's Notes

Hello Guitar Connoisseur'

Let me start my notes with a huge apology to you all. This issue should have released in March 2018. That was a very tough month for me personally. Let's just say I had a life-changing event that month and this issue was somewhat designed but every time I tried to get this issue released I was simply uninspired.

Nothing felt right and my head was simply not in it. It's been a few very tough months, I'll spare you the details and just wanted to express my gratitude for continuing to read along.

Now that the heavy stuff is out of the way lets have some fun. I'm very excited about this issue. I'm delighted to feature such extraordinary Luthiers such as Steve Helgeson of Moonstone Guitars and Joe Knaggs from Joe Knaggs talking about his new Honga Model.

On the artist side I am very excited about our cover artist John 5, not only is John an amazing musician but he is one of the nicest guys in the business.

Another person I'm honored to add to our roster of featured artists is Eric Gales. I've read a lot about Eric and I wanted to make sure that we touched on not only his incredible style and gear but on who he is as a person and where he's headed.

For those of you who enjoy a different style of guitar playing, we were lucky enough to get an interview with Flamenco Guitarist, Antonio Rey Navas. I've wanted to start incorporating more international players in our issues and I think Antonio was a perfect choice.

To finish up our issue we have a real treat for you. Singer-Songwriter Chelsea Williams. I thought her story was incredible and a really fantastic read for anyone who's looking to get serious in the business.

See ya in 90,

Kelcey Alonzo
Editor in Chief, Guitar Connoisseur

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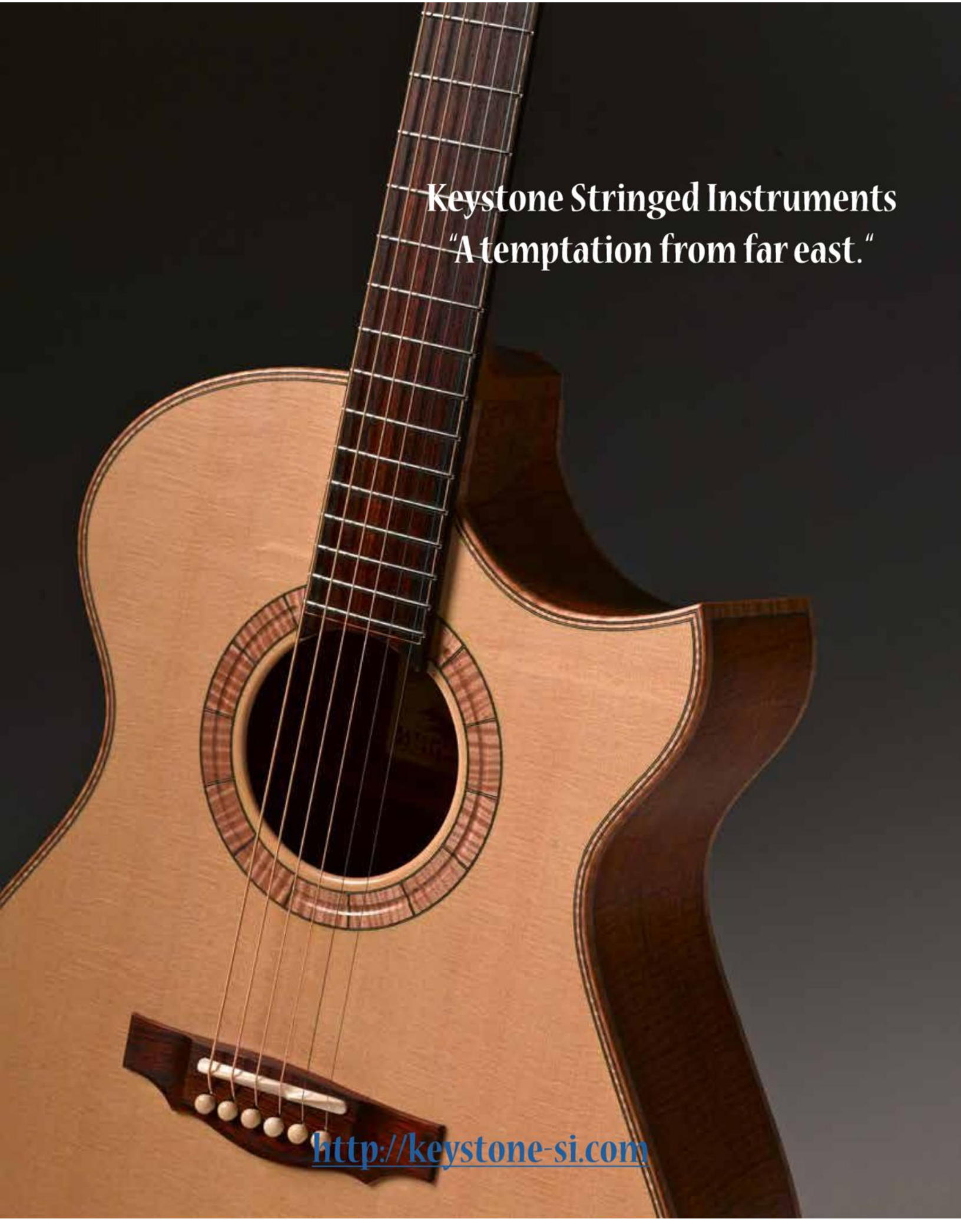
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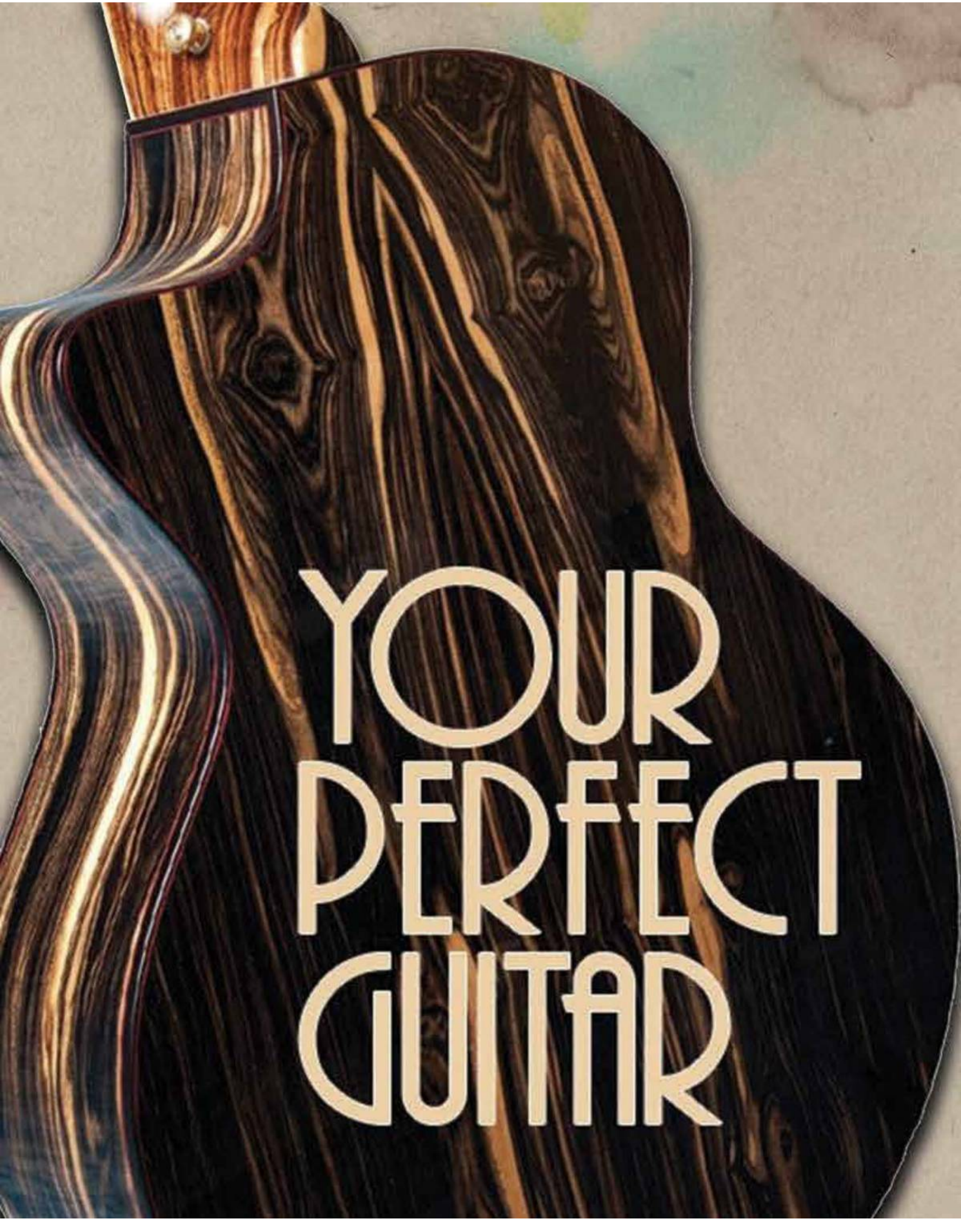
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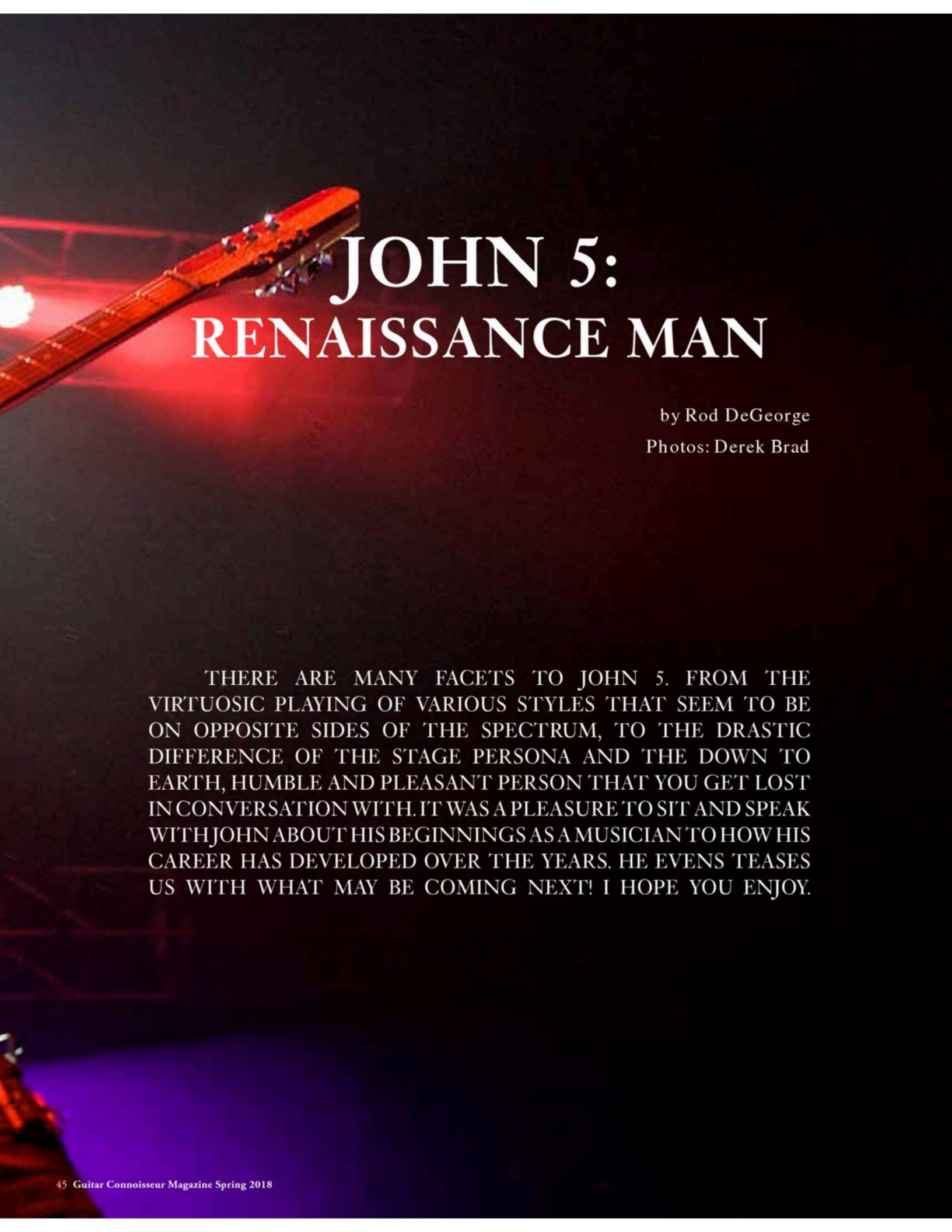


JOHN 5: RENAISSANCE MAN

by Rod DeGeorge

Photos: Derek Brad

THERE ARE MANY FACETS TO JOHN 5. FROM THE VIRTUOSIC PLAYING OF VARIOUS STYLES THAT SEEM TO BE ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE SPECTRUM, TO THE DRASTIC DIFFERENCE OF THE STAGE PERSONA AND THE DOWN TO EARTH, HUMBLE AND PLEASANT PERSON THAT YOU GET LOST IN CONVERSATION WITH. IT WAS A PLEASURE TO SIT AND SPEAK WITH JOHN ABOUT HIS BEGINNINGS AS A MUSICIAN TO HOW HIS CAREER HAS DEVELOPED OVER THE YEARS. HE EVENS TEASES US WITH WHAT MAY BE COMING NEXT! I HOPE YOU ENJOY.

Guitar Connoisseur: Could you tell us how you first became interested in the guitar and at what point did you know you wanted to make this your profession?

John 5: When I first became interested in the guitar? Actually, I know the exact time and point in my life. I was watching that show Hee Haw, we always watched it when I was a kid, and in 1976, there was a boy, a banjo champion and his name was Jimmy Henley. He was playing Orange Blossom Special with Roy Clark, and I remember this boy was young. He was young and I was probably six years old at the time, he was probably, you know, like say eight or nine, or probably nine or ten. And I was so blown away by a kid playing this well, I was shocked. And that was the time that I said, "I want to become a guitar player". Because I knew guitar looked cool and all that stuff, and that's the reason I play a Telecaster because all the guys on Hee Haw, they all played Telecasters, and I thought that was the only electric guitar in the world, it was that shape.

So, actually, with the power of YouTube I looked up that clip, and you can see it on YouTube. Actually, that was the time that I decided I wanted to be a guitar player. It's weird to see that, and that was the thing that changed my life.

GC: After all these years and now being an adult, as well as an accomplished player and professional musician, how does the actual clip compare to your memory of it?

J5: It's strange because, you know when things happen in your mind and you remember them, you will flask back and… well, you know, it almost looks just like I remember it. That's what is amazing about the mind and the brain, it's pretty incredible.

GC: As an 18-year old, you packed up, left the comforts of home, and moved to CA. Did you have any connections there, or have a specific plan? Can you talk about that experience and how you made that work, emotionally as well as financially?

J5: Yes, well I've been going to Southern California since I was three years old. My grandparents lived out there, so we would go every year. And so, I would just, you know go, go, go and so, I was like well, "if I'm going to be a serious musician, I'm going to move out to California". But I lived in Hollywood and my first night there, I got my money stolen, and anybody would have gone back with their tail between their legs going, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry". But I stuck it out and you know, just did everything I could. It was difficult, you know. It was difficult and to say the least, but I was so driven, and still am today, I really haven't changed much. You know, I'm still like that driven person. I don't get comfortable. I'm not like well, "I've done a lot and I'm going to kind of take it easy". I don't think that's the case and people you know when they do that, it's strange to me. I like to like sit down on the couch and play guitar and things like that. But if things aren't' going right, I will work all day and into the night and stuff like that to make things right. So really, that passion hasn't gone away at all.

GC: That's great! I think that's a big part of continuing to move forward musically as well as career wise. Speaking with Neal Schon & Carlos Santana in our interview in a previous issue, Neal was saying the same thing. He said that he has to keep moving forward. He wants to play every day and continue to grow as a musician.

J5: Yeah, now that guy, Neal Schon, he tours more than anyone I know. Because of the fact, we look at these things. You know, musicians look at tours and what's going on, he is always out on the road. It's incredible! It's really incredible!

GC: I've read that your goal was to be a session player. What let to that desire and how do you feel about that now, with the career that you find yourself in, including the stage persona and everything you have going on? Is that drastically different from the plan that you had of being a session player

J5: You know, the reason that I wanted to be a session musician is that I hated to travel. I hated traveling, I hated it. I know it's such a stupid reason, but you know, I was a kid and you know what, traveling, while I was thinking about it, traveling was completely different than it is today. Now, like, I hate to fly; so when you flew back in the day, I mean they had, you know, radar and things like that, but they didn't have the technology to go, okay, well we are going to take this different route and we are going to go around the storm. I remember you would fly through storms, do you remember that?

But nowadays, they can see everything and they just go around everything. I mean I don't know when the last time you flew, but the technology now with that is incredible because they just go around everything. Back in the day, it was terrifying. So, I was like, I just want to be a session musician because you wouldn't have to travel every day and everything that goes with traveling. And I was like, you know, just a young kid, but I never really wished to be like, it's hard for me to say, like a famous well-known musician, or rock star. You know? I never really wished that because it was so untouchable, it was so beyond my wildest dream. So, I appreciate it so much every day. Every single day, I appreciate it, what has happened and what is happening.

GC: I'm sure that attitude of appreciation and gratefulness plays a role in you staying so driven today.

J5: Yes, absolutely

GC: Can you talk about how you broke into the industry and how you compiled such an impressive list of artists that you have recorded with or performed with?

J5: Well, I was doing sessions in Los Angeles, but I was doing them for half the price of everyone else, and half the speed. Because you know, in the studio, they want you to get your track done quickly. They want the guitar tracks done quick, they want to get to the vocals, they want to get it done. You know, and I was doing them because I studied so hard my whole life. I mean from like 7 to 18, I was like, I'm going to know everything. So I would study it and I would go into the session like a boxer, they'd be like, "oh play this kind of thing", I'll be like (rattles off lick). So, I really studied it. So, I was doing it for half of the price, half of the speed of everybody else, and everybody was using me. So then, it just got the point where people were like, "Oh, would you like to do this tour?". You know, and things like that, and I was like, "Sure!". So, I kind of like guess it was just word of mouth. Plus, I understood that I am a side-person. These

"I APPRECIATE IT SO MUCH EVERY DAY. EVERY SINGLE DAY, I APPRECIATE IT, WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND WHAT IS HAPPENING. "

-JOHN 5-

people are here to see this artist, so I'm going to play exactly what it is on the record. I'm going to perform it, I'm not going to throw any arpeggios or, you know, anything like that and say "Look at me!". And that's why I think I've worked so much throughout the years.

When I was playing with KD Lang, we did a live DVD. When I was playing with (Marlyn) Manson, we did a live album and live DVD. So every time I was playing with somebody, they put out live material, because I was playing it. I was trying to play the music exactly, and right on the beat, and it was like a game, I would play with myself, so it wouldn't get repetitive. I was trying to see how perfect I would get it because you know, I love Steely Dan, and they were like, Perfection. You would get to perfection, but you wanted to go beyond perfection and so, that's always what I was trying to reach.

GC: That's great! An everyday challenge. Even if you had a spectacular show the night before, now you want to see if you can recreate that.

J5: Exactly, and that was the fun part of it. You know the really fun part about it is, that is what I'm doing with the Creatures. Because this stuff is a MONSTER live! Now, we are talking a zillion notes, and we are talking about so much stuff, so we all, the band, are trying to see how perfect we can get it. And it's so funny, because after the show when we're driving back to the hotel, it is silent because everybody is exhausted. Not exhausted because we are jumping off risers or anything, but we are mentally drained.

GC: Unfortunately, I didn't get to catch your show when you were in town, I had a gig myself, but I have been checking out some live footage and you guys are doing a great job executing difficult passages one right after the other, song after song. There is no time to let your mind drift or wander. That has to be a challenge to do that night after night.

J5: Exactly! Exactly! It's hard because man, I'm telling you. Because, here's one thing we are not doing, we are not improvising. Everything that you are hearing, these are songs from albums, and this is the game I play again. I'm trying to reach this perfection. So, I'm playing every single note that you hear, is every single note on the record. And I think if you put in John 5 entire show, I think that whole show, either Portland or somewhere in Washington, it's on there. And I would love to have you see it.

GC: Yeah, I believe that was one of them that I was watching. That was Killer!

J5: Thanks, man! And if you listen to the songs, the actual recorded songs, and you A/B them, it's exact! And it is a game because, and I'm glad I'm talking to you about this because you understand, it's just like, it's a really hard, but fun challenge every night.

GC: Yes, it is definitely a challenge, and a great practice in focus and being in the moment.

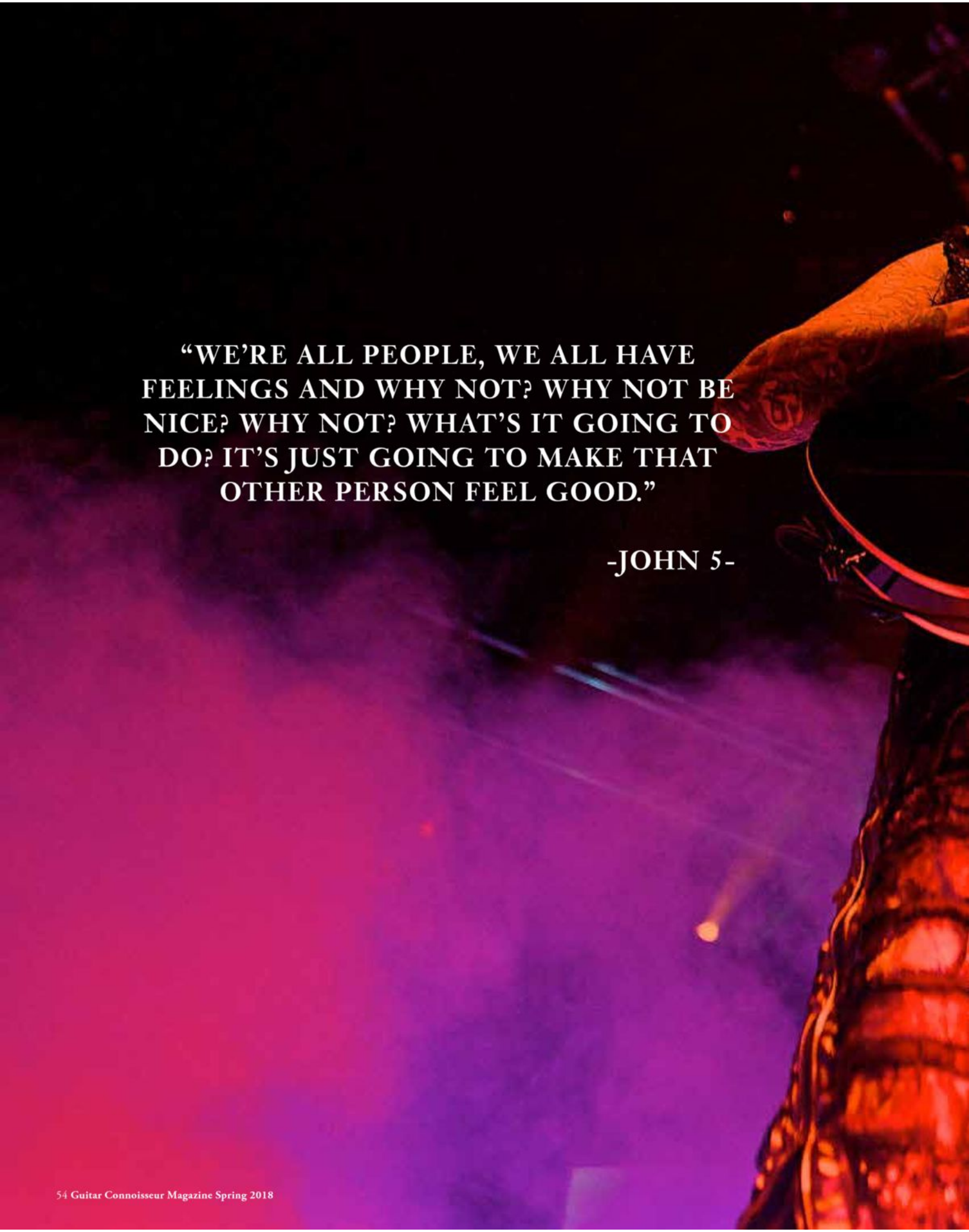
J5: Exactly, and I talked to the other guys about this as well. I really kind of did research on this, why do people mess up if they are playing something for a long time and they've done it a long time? What I've come up with is your brain, of course, it's just common knowledge, that your brain, it just wanders a little bit. And you are thinking about, oh, did I turn the stove off, you know or something. As soon as your brain goes away from that, you know, it could be over. Because you are thinking of timing and dexterity and just perfection and hitting everything correctly and where your fingers are. But it's hard at a show because people are trying to get your attention, they are trying to tap on your foot. You know, they are doing everything in their power, they are filming you right in your face etc. So it's like somebody juggling chainsaws and throwing balls at you while you're doing that.

GC: Yes, it's definitely a challenge! Now, with all the big name artists that you have performed with, such as K. D. Lang, David Lee Roth, Rob Halford, Marilyn Manson, Rob Zombie etc., can you talk a bit about some of the stand out moments to you from those experiences?

J5: I mean they are all real stand-out performances. You know, like, I'm a fan just like anyone else, but like when I first started playing with KD Lang, my first real gig was VH1 fashion musical awards. I don't know if we opened the show or not, but I think it was the first annual or second annual, and the curtain opened and there was Peter Gabriel, Madonna, Prince, etc. you know, because they put them all in the front. So, we're playing and I was like "This is insane! This is weird!" This is like waking up and going, "I had this weird dream that I was playing for Prince and Madonna", it's like because you hear friends talk like that, you know?. And then like with Manson, my first show, the first time being on stage with him, because I always wanted to see Marilyn Manson live but I'd never got the chance because I was touring, or it just didn't make it. Some reason, I didn't get the chance. So, my very first time seeing Manson was with me on stage and it was at the MTV Video Music Awards doing Dope Show. I kept on looking at him because I wanted to watch the show, and it's the truth. I mean, it sounds so stupid but it's the truth. You know, and all these shows, are so many shows and so many great things, I mean Download with (Rob) Zombie and all these great moments, just, it's been such an amazing experience. That's why I don't take it for granted. I love it so much, but you know, it's been a real, real, real treat, I'm going to have to say. I'm so lucky and… you know, I played the Sydney Opera House in Australia and I've played everywhere all over the world, and I just cannot believe it. So, it's been it's been a real gift.

GC: The stage experiences I'm sure were all amazing in their own right, but you've also toured with a wide variety of personalities, both on stage and with the type of people who come to the shows, I assume there were times where you find yourself in situations where you might be thinking, "This is crazy, no one would believe me if I told them what was going on"

J5: Oh absolutely, every night with Marilyn Manson. Oh yeah, it's like, I remember laying in the bunk and going, "This can't be good, this can't be right". You know, and you feel horrible about yourself. I mean, I'm not talking about like, if a bird hit your windshield, I'm talking like, you are like "This cannot be good for anyone!". So, and that happened a lot, every night was New Year's Eve you know? So, the very first night I got on tour with these guys, you know, they always put the party in my room, and


“WE’RE ALL PEOPLE, WE ALL HAVE FEELINGS AND WHY NOT? WHY NOT BE NICE? WHY NOT? WHAT’S IT GOING TO DO? IT’S JUST GOING TO MAKE THAT OTHER PERSON FEEL GOOD.”
-JOHN 5-

I remember there was like this guy, one of the guys that worked for us, just got a video camera and he was going to video the tour. And this was… or was it my first tour? It was one of the other tours I think. So, we had a video camera and this is all on you know, the Guns God and Government DVD by Marilyn Manson. It's a special feature called 'Death Parade' and the very first night of the tour, this girl's like smoking a cigarette with her vagina, and then there was this other girl, that pissed in the trash can, but when she pulled down her pants, she had a dick. That was the very first, just the first night and it just escalated from there. And that's all on the D.V.D. They'll see it. I don't know, I think they took the vagina part of smoking a cigarette, I think they took that out. But what she did, obviously she practiced this, because she turned the light out and you could see the cigarette illuminate in the dark. So she obviously has done this before.

GC: Now, from seeing footage of you in interviews, conducting lessons etc., you seem like a down to earth, genuinely nice guy. You had to have found yourself in situations that were a little uncomfortable.

J5: Oh of course, yeah of course, of course, I was the guy, you know, I was just saying like you know, I just want to play a good show. And I just want, you know, perfection and you know to be honest with you, just for us chit chatting and talking here, I think it was, that's maybe one of the things they got me out of the band you know? I just wasn't the party guy that the other guys were. And it just didn't, I think it just didn't gel for them. I just want to play the best show and put on like perfection. Because you know that's, it's just who I've always been. Plus, I loved Marilyn Manson, so, I really respected my job. But it's just like, you know if you're in any situation. If we were in a band together and we were all sober and there was this total crazy person, you'd be like "This guy's not really working out". It was just like, you know, I think that was what the downfall was.

GC: Yeah, it can be tricky living on the road with different personalities, different factions can develop and some people like to let loose and some just like to keep to themselves a little more.

J5: Yeah. and it's you know, it's still great. It was so much fun, I wouldn't change it for the world. You know, not for the world! I still have such a great respect for those guys and they're doing great, you know? I think it's awesome!

GC: You are such a versatile player and composer, can you talk about where the origin of your musical roots lie, and how you started to expand and incorporate the various styles and techniques that are now part your playing?

J5: It was, I just loved… I love anything that anyone could do well. Like you know, if someone is riding a unicycle. I was like man, look at that! That's just so awesome, he's like a master at riding the unicycle! I mean, it could be anything that anyone was doing really well and I loved it, and I ate it up. I was just like "Woh, that's fucking awesome!" you know? And I think that was one of the things which I was just, I wanted perfection all the time and I just want to be a session guy, so, I would do everything in my power, because there wasn't YouTube, so I would learn everything I could by just looking at other styles and reading and practicing and doing all that stuff.

GC: One thing that I personally enjoy, is the fact that when you incorporate different styles and techniques, such as some of the country stuff, you do it in such a musical way, and people who may be familiar with your heavier stuff, can still relate and enjoy that.

J5: Well, thank you very much and it's also a trip to do it when you have all this makeup on your face, like monsters and all that stuff. But it's cool because… so, I'd say ninety-nine percent of the people are like, you know, I come out, and I'm doing this heavy stuff, and when I start with the country and the bluegrass stuff, people lose their mind because, even if they don't listen to it or like it, they've heard it in their lives. But when they see it, they're like "Oh my God, this is so rad!", you know? This is just something I would like to see. So, I'm just doing stuff that I wanted to see, you know? That's it. Because it's from the heart, everything I'm doing is from the heart, and I love it, and I think that's what makes it real to people.

GC: I think that comes through in the music when an artist is still passionate about their craft, I think the audience can feel that.

J5: Absolutely, 100%!

GC: After following your career and seeing a bunch of interviews and lessons that you've conducted, I can't help but notice the drastic difference between what seems to be a down to earth, laid back, nice guy, to the stage persona, artwork and subject matter of a lot of your work. Can you talk about that, and where the horror show element comes from?

J5: You know, it's just really interesting to me, and it's all like kind of psychological. From when I was a kid, I just loved Universal Monsters, I loved it! You know, everything about it. So, like. we're all just the same kids as we were when we were six or seven, so, it's just what I loved. I love Famous Monsters, you know, magazines the Famous Monsters of film magazine, and I just you know, you are a kid, you just love that stuff. It was comforting to me. And then I saw Kiss, and it was like Monsters with guitars! I just bought it. I just bought it because of the cover you know? I was like, "This is incredible!". And so, you know, but then you get into like the serial killers and stuff like that, and of course, I don't support that stuff or condone it at all. I'm just so interested how their brain works. You know, it's… if you really think about it, it's pretty astounding how these people, how their brains work. And it's just, you know, and that's why there are so many movies like that. That's why in every single, every single movie except for maybe love movies or things like that, there's violence or there's a gun, or there is something like that. Because people that's what people like. You know that's what people like, every single movie! You know, video games too, everything! And that's the same thing with me, you know? I enjoy it, but I… you know it's fun, and I like to read about it and things like that, but the last thing I would do is ever harm anyone, and that's why I'm like, nice to people. I just treat people how I want to be treated, and I treat everybody the same. Like you know, if I'm on tour, and there are road crew guys and, I was never that person that didn't talk to everyone. I talked to everyone in high school, or in you know, junior high, or anything like that. You know, I said hello to

KILL WAR

everybody, and that's what I do now today. We're all people, we all have feelings and why not? Why not be nice? Why not? What's it going to do? It's just going to make that other person feel good.

GC: Yes. Exactly! Now you had talked about the psychology of all of this, do you feel that it affects you as a performer? Does putting on the make-up and the wardrobe affect your state of mind for a performance?

J5: It's kind of just like putting on a shirt, but you know, what I do is entertainment. You know, it's entertainment. And I've given all these things a lot of thought, and when I would go to the dressing room, people are like "Oh yeah; okay cool". You know, "Hey what's up?", but then when I'm walking to the stage with all the garb on, people are like… that's when the cameras come out, like, people freak out! So, it's like… okay well, that makes sense. I'm going to just keep doing this because this is what is working.

GC: Can you talk about your compositional process? Do you find your ideas mostly come with your guitar in hand, or do you hear and arrange things in your head and then go to the instrument to flush them out.

J5: It's usually just playing guitar. But sometimes I'll hear something in my head and it works. You know, that's what's cool about it. It kind of does work but that's not all the time, that's pretty rare. Because, well… I guess because I'm always playing guitar, you know? I'm always playing guitar. Right now, if I wasn't talking with you, I'll be playing guitar. So, yes it's just from playing guitar and just coming up with stuff and doing it that way.

GC: Can you tell us about your new release Season of the Witch and the similarities and differences from your previous releases?

J5: Well this one, just like every other release, every song was very important. Just like in anyone's release. Every song is important. Every band works so hard, and they try to make it as great as possible. But what is happening nowadays, it seems there's a lot of bands that all these great songs are getting lost because everyone just cherry picks everything. You know? They're like, "Well, I just want to hear this song, I kind of like this song" etc. But all the other songs are awesome too, and they worked just as hard. It's just because there's a video for these other songs. So, I started doing all these videos for the songs and it works. You know it really, it really worked, doing all these videos for the songs. Because people get into the songs more that way. And you know, well, my son, he just watches YouTube. That's how my son listens to music. And it's pretty incredible that it's at that point now. And so I just made all these videos and people know all these songs.

GC: That leads into my next question regarding the change in the industry due to the usage of the internet. Along with making more videos, how has this changed the way you market your music to make people aware of new releases?

J5: Well it's completely different. It's so completely different from when I started. Just like from my first instrumental record, you know? It's so different. You know CDs were still very important in 2004. But you know, now people aren't really even downloading, and that's CRAZY! People aren't downloading, they're just streaming now. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, I'm just… I do it myself. I'm like "Hey I want to listen to this Al Di Meola album that I haven't heard in a thousand years". So, I'll pull that up, and you know I can listen to it. It sounds amazing and here we go, and that's what people are doing now, you know? They don't even download, they don't even buy stuff and it's crazy! But, I do it too. We were backstage and our bass player was like "I keep hearing about Adrian Belew's new record" so, he pulled it up and we listen to it, and it's that simple man. It's crazy! It's that simple.

GC: Now, technology, in and of itself in can be neutral, it's how it's used that can be positive or negative. Do you have any thoughts on how this new phase of the industry is structured? It is very hard for an artist to get paid fairly.

J5: Yes and it's a nightmare. That's why I got out of writing for people. That's the honest to God truth. That is actually why I got out of writing for people. Because it was way too much work, for not a big return. Before, it was a great return! But now, it's like "Okay cool, you have a number one record and the return was like, what? This is what we make from a number one record nowadays?". Yeah, so I just write for myself and I'll write for Rob Zombie. But then, I'll write for friends you know? I just wrote with Steve Perry and that will be coming out soon. So, you know, we're buddies and I'll do it for fun. But not for like, "Oh I'm going to really reap the rewards" you know? Those days are long gone. That's why I'm touring, that's why I'm on tour. I mean I'm so thankful I've gotten out of my tomb with a view and started touring.

GC: What does the future hold for John 5? Do you have any dream collaborations or situations, that you would like to be in? A long-term goal that you are working towards?

J5: You know, it sounds so stupid but it's the truth. It's like… I'm just so happy now! Like, if something comes along you know… I'll always play with Rob Zombie, I always do instrumental stuff, but if something comes along, great. But I'm so content, you know? Someone may say "Play a solo on my record, or write this with me", great. But I'm so psyched of what's going on. For my next instrumental thing, you know, I'm always thinking, but I think I'm going to go in a different direction. I'm not going to really say anything about it yet, because I'm still going to see if it's going to work. But, I just started to figure out what I'm going to do but it's going to be exciting!

GC: Very cool! It has to be great to be in a position where you aren't searching and you are very happy to be where you are.

J5: Yeah I'm very, very lucky, very, very fortunate and I'm psyched.

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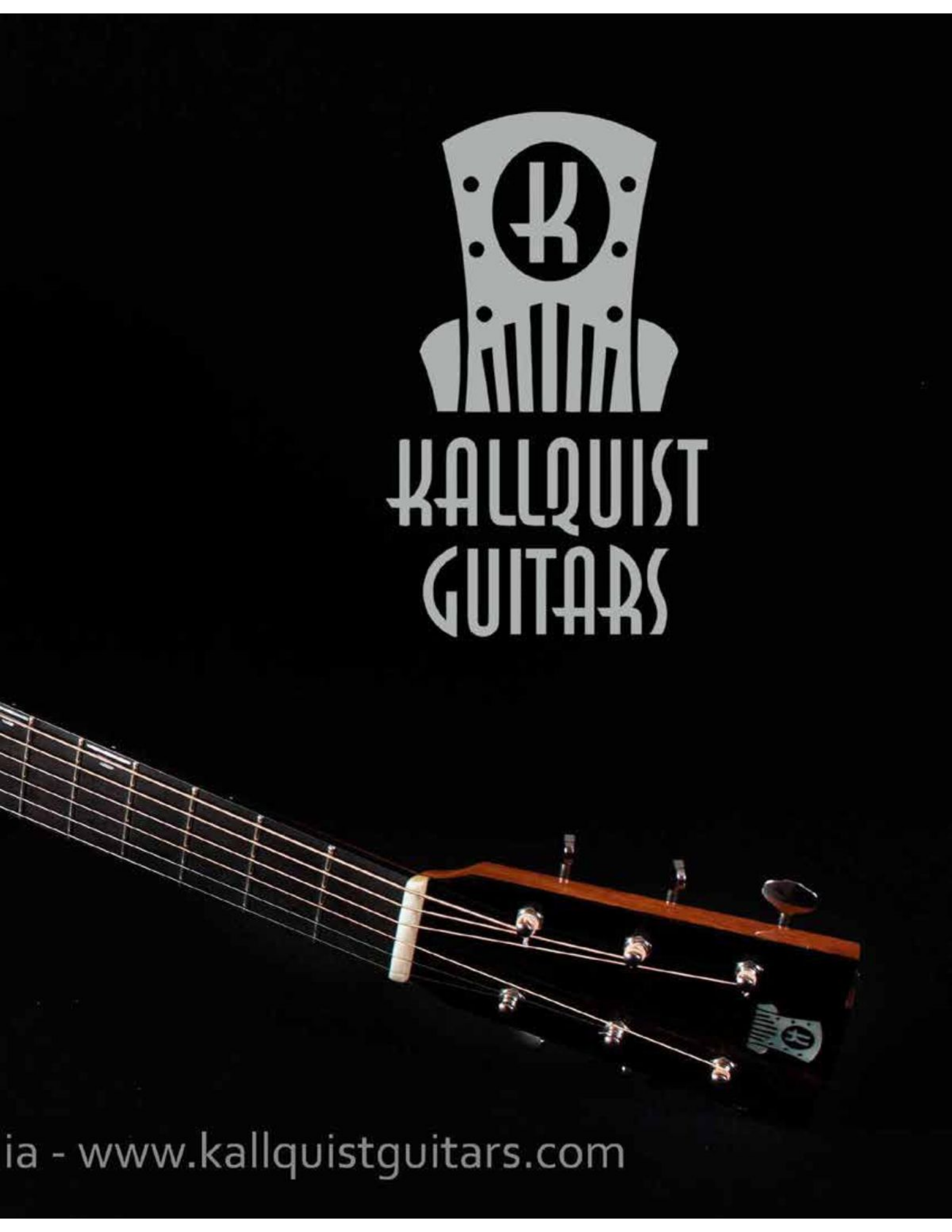
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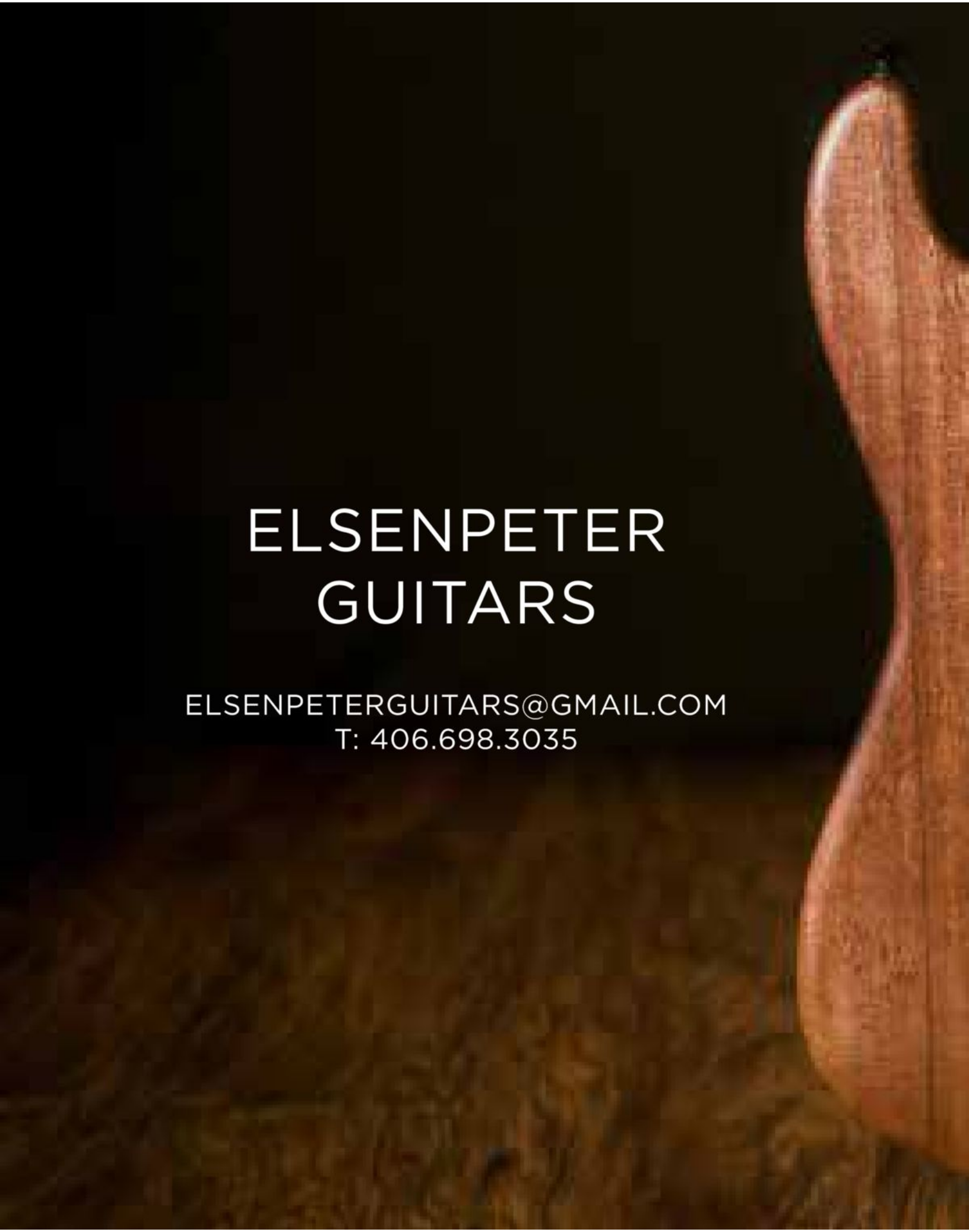

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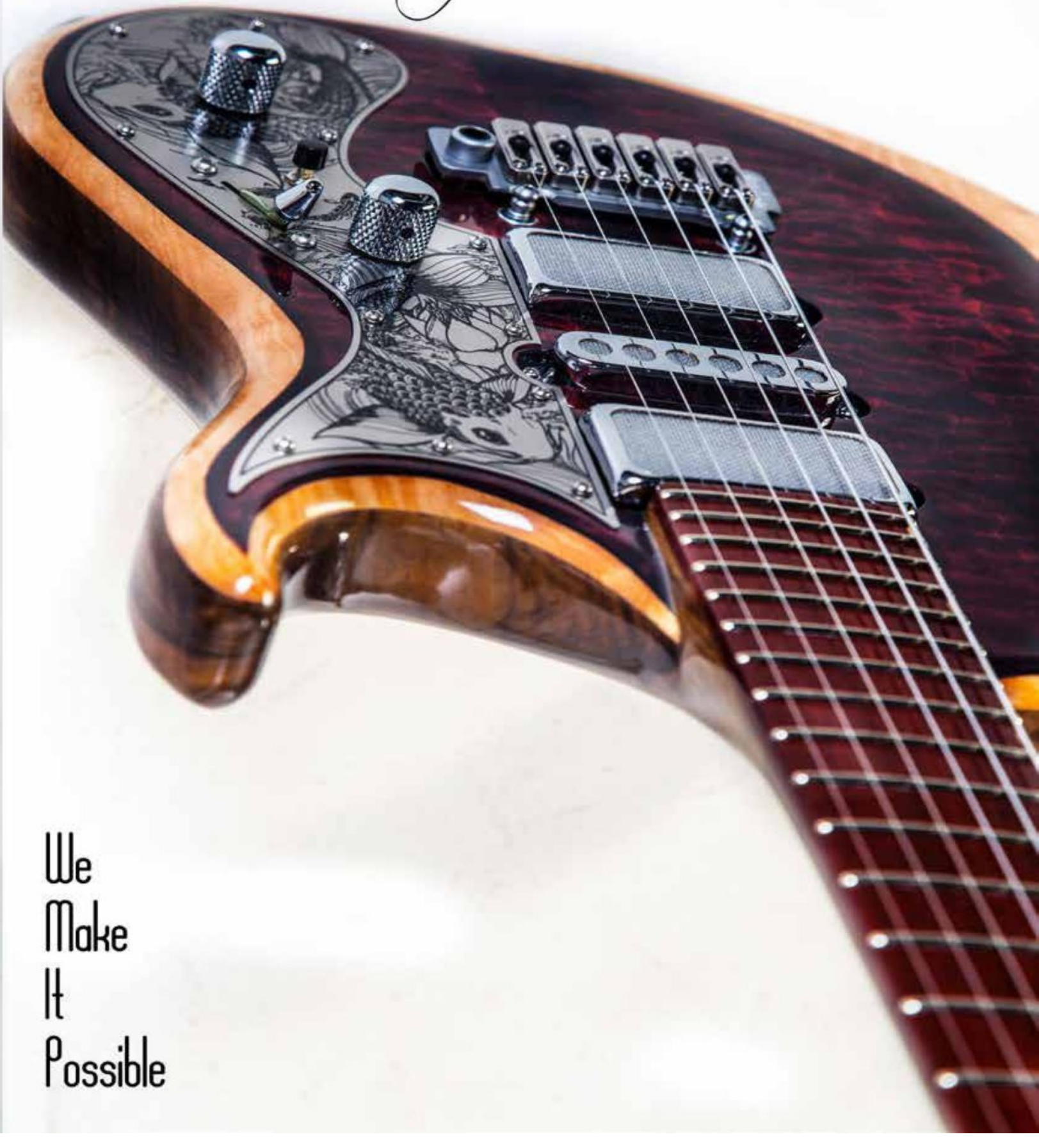

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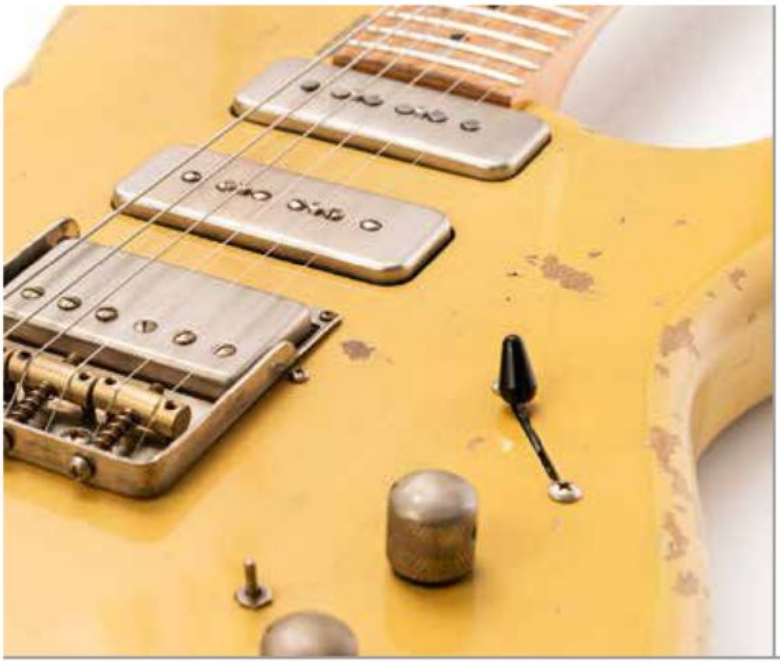
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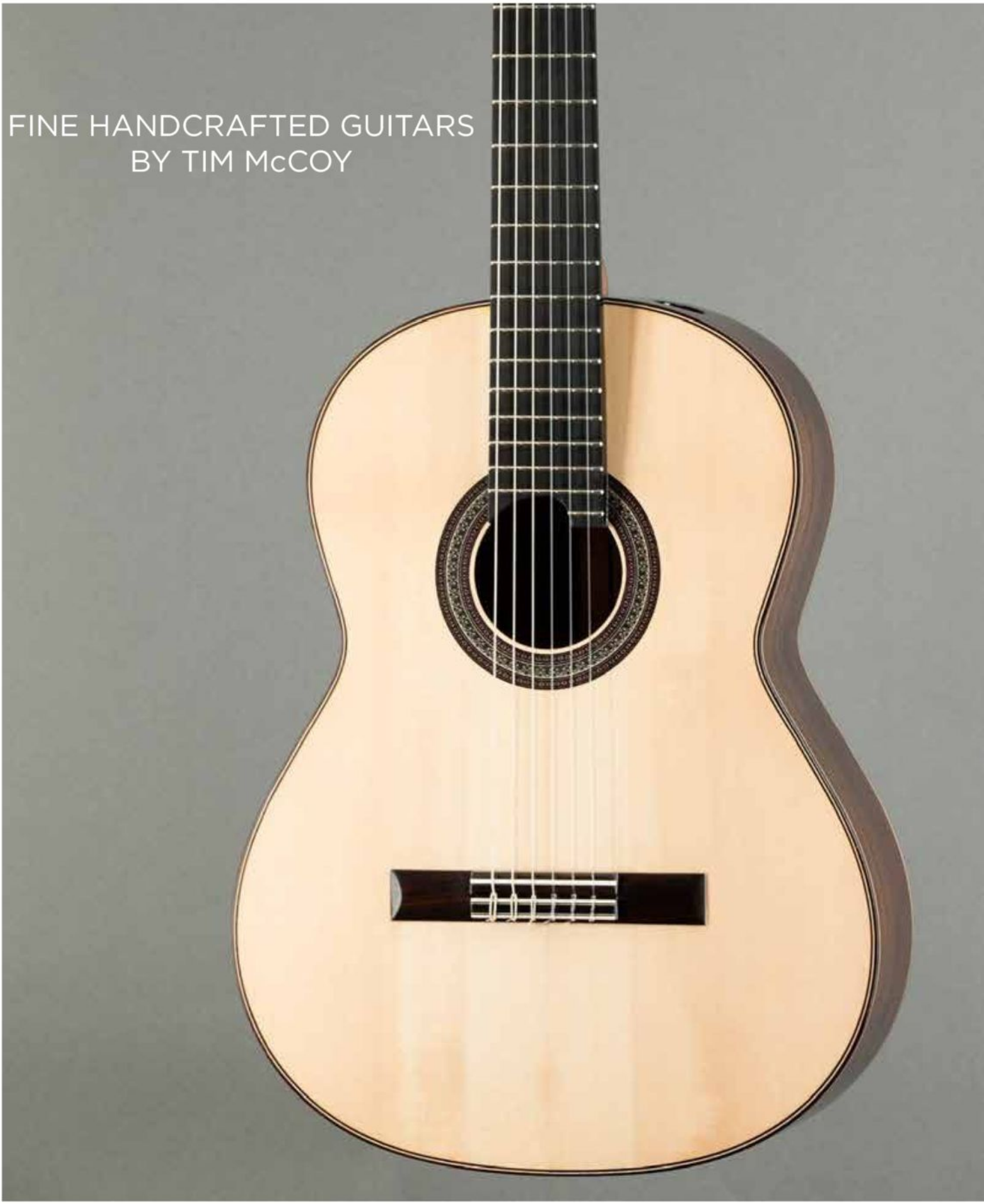

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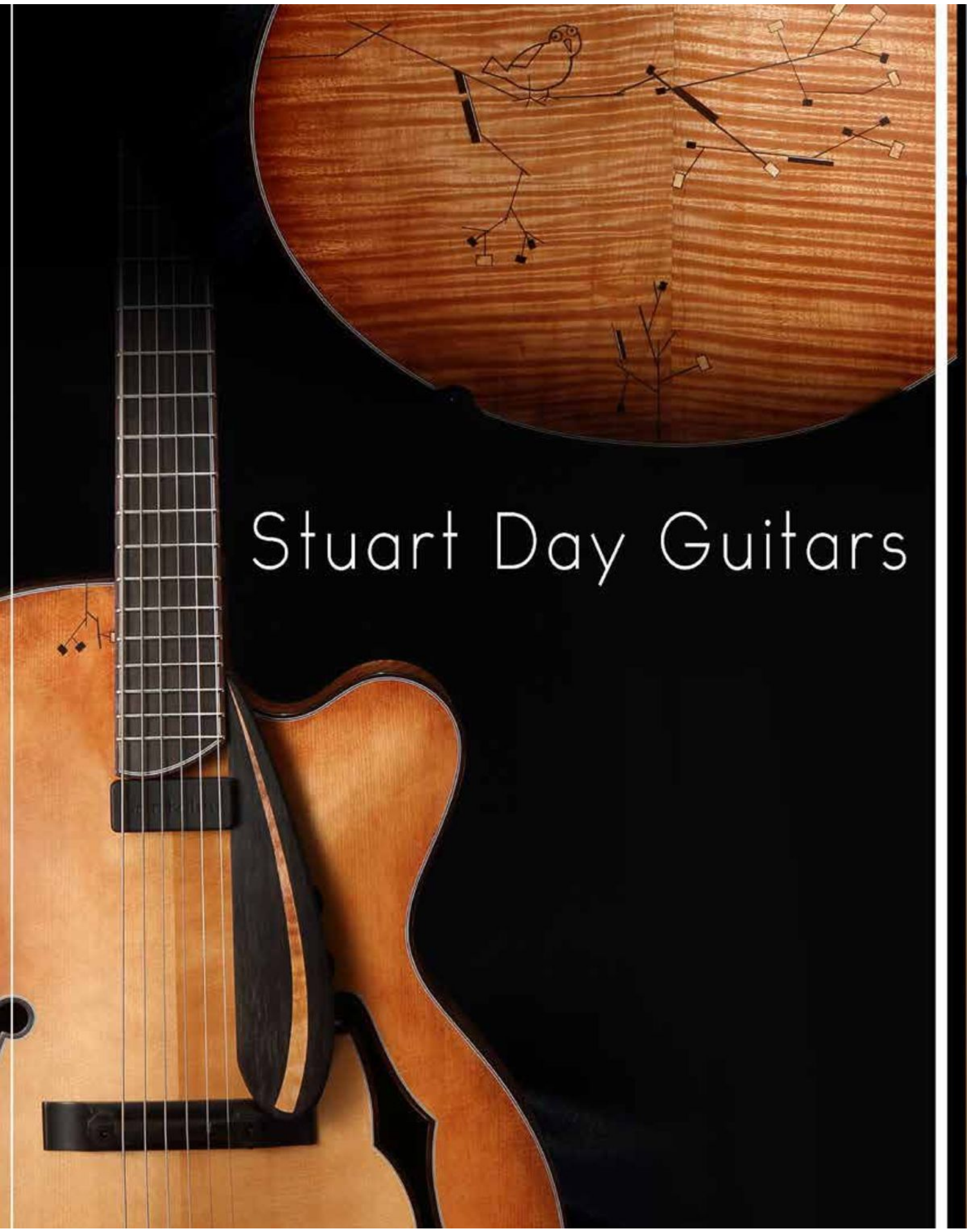
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KNAGGS GUITARS: HONGA

by Steve Rider

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Guitar Connoisseur: I like to begin these interviews with some deep background. When did you first become interested in music and at what point did the idea of building guitars come to you?

Joe Knaggs: Hi Steve, I like to begin these interviews by saying thanks! It's always an honor – My first memory of music was my sister playing a "45" of Good Vibrations – I think I was 5. What really got me into music though was a time at my friend house, shooting pool. I was probably 10 or 11 years old – I heard a 12 string acoustic guitar and it really caught my ear- I think it was the Eagles or America. I was hooked on music for some reason. My friend's father was a concert violinist, so they always had good music playing – Robby Izzi played in a band that did Chicago tunes, horns and all! I started playing guitar at 11. I bought my first album – Neil Young "After the Gold Rush" then my second album, Zappa's "Apostrophe".... I then started listening to jazz and got really hooked, but I also listened to Rock like Sabbath, Jethro Tull, Led Zeppelin, ELP, Yes etc.... I would go the Public Library and check out Jazz albums. They had everything from Miles to Pat Metheny.

I thought about the Honga, and why I was interested in making that type of guitar. I went to see Zappa when I was 11 years old with my older brother and his friends (I looked at my boy when he was 11 ... I would have NEVER let him go to a show like that) – It was the "Apostrophe" tour – It was insane... Somehow we got to sit in the front row! I had never been to anything like it. I was 11 years old! The smell of hash all around and a bunch of freaks. Zappa came out and hit the harmonics to tune up – Speakers stacked up on each side of the stage to the ceiling, loud as shit, and they immediately broke into Montana from Overnight Sensation! It was that SG he played – that was the first guitar I ever heard at that kind of volume with that kind of power! That memory stuck like glue. What a fucking band!

I did not think about building guitars until I was about 25 years old when it became my career. I only played and played a lot like so many others in our industry.

GC: How did you end up at PRS all those years ago, and how did that time shape your approach to design and production?

JK: I was working in a finishing place – We sprayed and finished everything you could think of from furniture for the White House to hospital ductwork. Paul and I knew each other from growing up on the same street in Bowie Maryland. He was 6 years older than me, but we knew each other. I refinished a strat body and brought to his West street shop to see if he needed finishing work done on the side. He had Bud Davis at the time doing his finishing work, so it did not happen. About a year later he started the business and he called me. They were having a lot of trouble with their finishing. I started working there as the finishing manager, then a year later production manager, then started building all the prototypes and artist guitar, then started the Private Stock line, and finally ended up running R&D, Private Stock and was head of getting new models online. During this time I was also one of the top executives in the business. I designed the Mira, Starla, Singlecut, SCJ , Hollowbody/ Archtop, mandolin, and Gary Grainger bass... along with designing the Private Stock guitars. I was an artist all my life, and somehow designing body shapes, headstocks came naturally to me... It's not easy to come up with really good shapes. Somehow it comes easy to me. Must have been from looking at all those "girly" magazines when I was a kid!

GC: Mahogany and Maple look to be a favorite combination for your guitars. What is it about these two kinds of wood that keep you coming back to them?

JK: They sound good and look good. Curly maple is a freak of nature, so it has a mysterious quality to it as far as looks go – Also, Mahogany is a great wood to work with. That is why the furniture makers used it. It carves nice and is very stable. We use other woods as well – Swamp Ash, Alder, Spruce, etc... They all have their own sonic qualities. The combinations of the woods make the guitar as well. For instance, an acoustic has Spruce for the top – This wood has nice highs and lows, and some midrange, the neck is made of Mahogany for mids, the fingerboard is ebony for highs, the back and sides vary depending on what you want to add as far as highs, lows, and midrange. That is a very "basic" way of describing it.

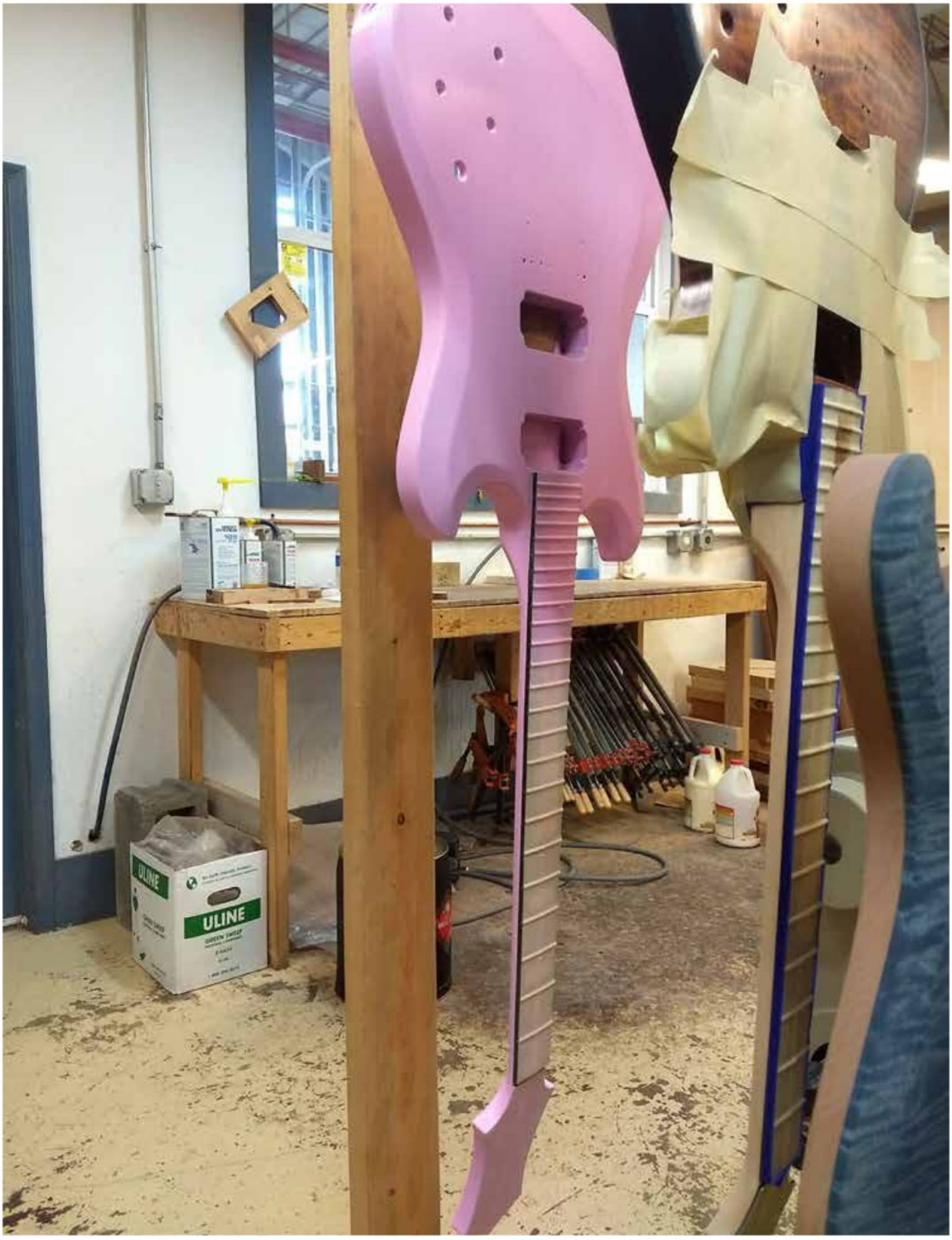
GC: Knaggs guitars use unique styles of bridges. How did you develop these and what were you looking for in a bridge that led to the reinvention of the classic styles?

JK: I designed the Choptank Hardtail bridge first. I looked at a Tele bridge and wondered why they did not screw the front of the bridge plate down. My Dear friend Eric Johnson (not the guitar player) and I made a prototype version of the hardtail bridge plate out of tool steel. I put it on my Choptank I had just made and it sounded really unbelievable. The guitar rang forever. We then decided to make a trem version by cutting the front of the plate off and putting a pin between them. The pin did not work well so we developed a ball bearing system. It worked great. This "Chesapeake" bridge - trem and hardtail, drive the sound farther into the middle of the body. I like that sound because there is a lot of warmth and sustain in that area and makes for a very "even" sound in the guitar.

The influence bridge has the same theory in mind. I wanted the sound that is generated behind the saddle break to be part of the overall sound. By combining the stoptail and bridge all in one you get these upper harmonics driven

Knaggs Guitars

Knaggs Guitars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into the middle of the body more. I also wanted the string posts to be screwed into the bridge plate first, before being driven into the wood. I wanted the bridge to ring as "one". Again, this adds sustain and more harmonics (which create the sustain). If the initial energy created by plucking the string is uninterrupted, the guitar can ring longer and you can hear more harmonic levels. More overtones. The way we make our necks also adds to the sustain.

GC: The Honga is part of your Influence series. Could you describe what sets this series apart from some of your other offerings?

JK: The Honga is of course based on an SG type guitar. This type of guitar has the bridge located in the waist area of the guitar. This, along with the body being very thin make this type of guitar what it is. It also pushes the neck out further, so your hand feels farther out. I always played a strat, so an SG felt very natural to me. You get the feel of a longer scale guitar with the shorter scale length. The Honga has that low midrange "honk". That low midrange "honk" is clear as day. Of course, there are other things that make the guitar what it is, but this sound is what makes it. P90's and Humbuckers have a very different sound coming out of this type of guitar.

GC: I see that the neck shape is described as Honga. Do all your guitars get a specific neck shape, and if so, what is the impetus behind it?

JK: All of our guitars have their own neck shape. I based the Choptank off an old 52 tele, the Severn off my old 61 strat, the Kenai, Chena, and Sheyenne off 59 LP, etc.... I then put my own twists on the necks, like taking the shoulders out a bit to make them more comfortable... I did the same with the Honga. The impetus is a comfortable neck that feels somewhat like home.

GC: What does the Honga model offer that differentiates it from the other guitars in the Influence line?

JK: Again, the feel and sound. 24 frets as well. A different look as well. Maybe a bit "retro"?

GC: For pickups, you are offering Seymour Duncan SH-1, Seth Lovers, or Lollar Imperial PAF. How did you decide which pickups would be offered in this model?

JK: We picked the pickups that we felt best suited the instrument, as well as the maker's reliability. Just like guitar makers and amp makers, there are 100's of pickup makers out there. There are guys like Jason Lollar, Tim Mills, Lindy Fralin, and of course Seymour Duncan that has studied pickup making the way we have studied guitar making. We believe in taking advantage of that knowledge, and we believe in them! As long as they deliver, we will be proud to put them in our guitars and basses.

GC: You offer a great variety of options on the finishes and materials for the Honga, it almost seems like every guitar is, in some respect, a custom model. Was that your intention for Knaggs?

JK: We came up with an entire line of guitars so hopefully, we would have something to offer everyone interested in a "top notch", quality, professional guitar or bass. When I play our guitars, I hear sustain and harmonics I don't usually hear in most guitars. I am not saying that the other guitars are not good, I just hear this difference in our guitars. I would play a Severn over my old 61 strat, and the strat was my go-to baby when I played seriously. I hear a different tool to use. As far as each one being custom – we offer tons of different items on our price/option list. We could build guitars for 2 years if we did one of each model and option, so yes, each one has its own thing going on.

GC: Laminate tops are starting to become widely used by boutique builders. Do you feel that Knaggs was ahead of the pack on this particular design?

JK: Yes, we have come up with many different, innovative looks. We wanted our guitars to stand out when someone walked into a sea of guitars on the wall. Something different, but not different just for the sake of being different. We wanted these guitars to have their own identity and beauty. I think these things add to that identity.

GC: Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers: anything more about the Honga model or upcoming news?

JK: I would always like to give a shout out to our wonderful artists and customers. Thank you, EVERYONE! Peter Wolf has worked extremely hard getting these new artists like Doug Rappaport to play our guitars, along with all the other things he is dealing with. I truly feel that when these working musicians play one of our guitars, they hear what we hear. Hopefully, they are turned on by that sound, feel and looks. We have a crew of guys, with years and years of experience. Peter, myself and all the guys here are working extremely hard to put out the best instrument we can.

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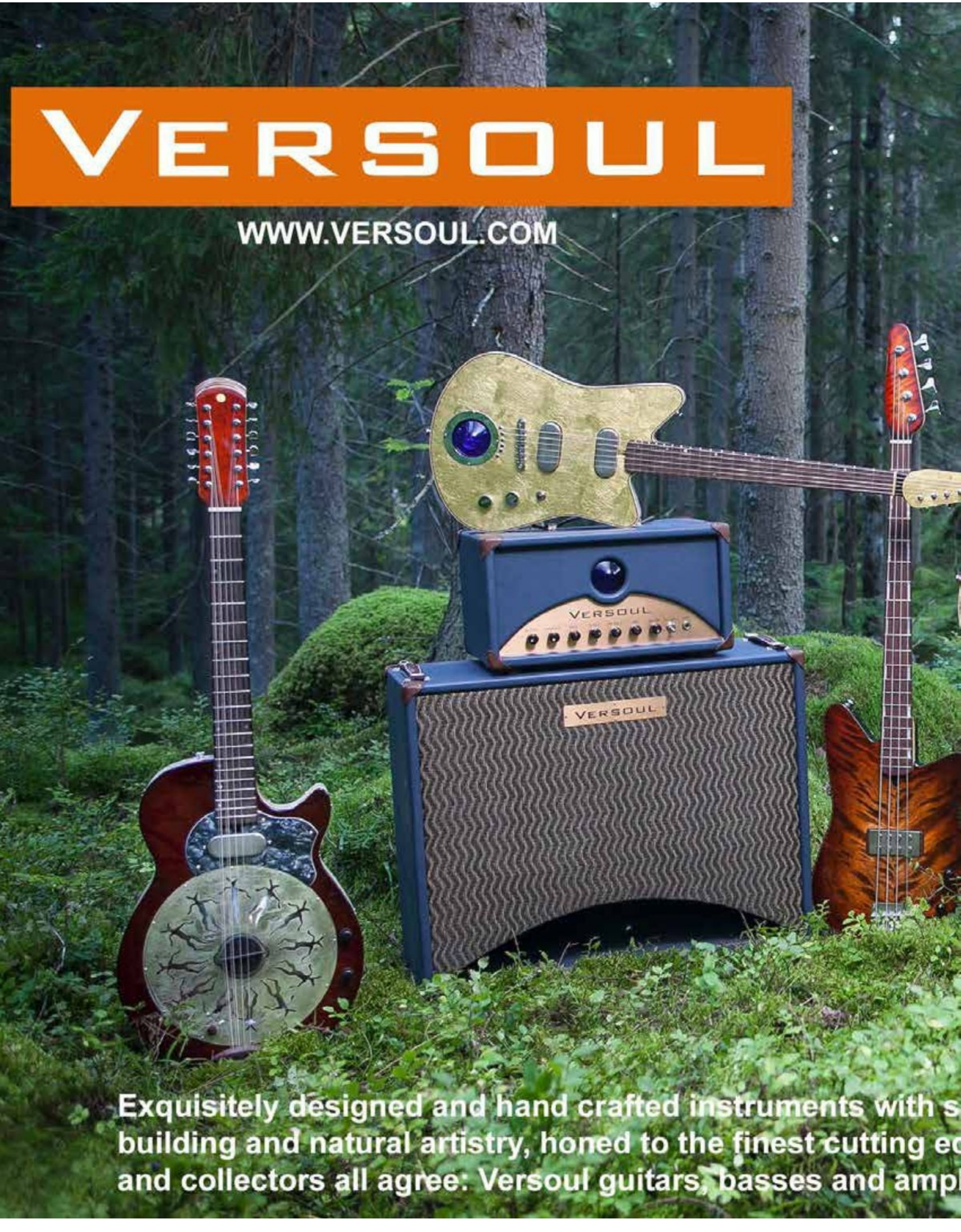
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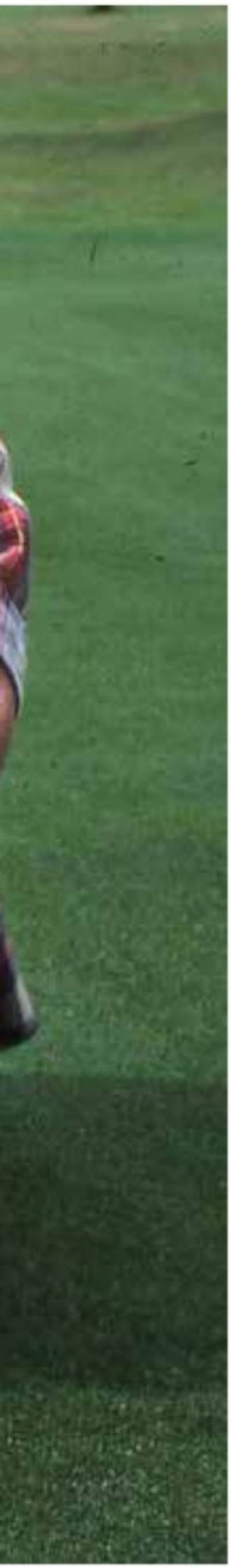

Steve Helgeson - Moonstone Guitars

by Steve Rider

Steve Helgeson has a long history of craftsmanship with his Moonstone guitars. The man who pioneered the use of quilted maple in luthiery and supplied esteemed players such as J.J. Cale chose long ago not to go the production route. Instead, Steve has focused on constructing the finest hand-crafted instruments from top quality materials, combined with dazzling inlay work. Moonstone provides players with a wide range of selections in acoustic and electric instruments including many baritone scales.

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GC: Moonstone guitars has a long history. Can you tell us how you got started way back in the '70s?

SH: It was back in the 70s, I decided I wanted to build an acoustic bass so I could jam with a bunch of people. There were like fifty guitar players out in the(Yosemite) meadow, but no acoustic bass players. I could pick up chicks; what else? So I built an acoustic bass. It was kind of crummy but it worked. Then I build a six string cutaway where I milled all the wood at the(College of the Redwoods) woodshop there and bent the sides around a hot stove pipe where I was living in Ferndale at the time. I didn't have a mold, so it was asymmetrical. But it wasn't half bad. I was self-taught.

GC: Would you say that there was a community you were involved with that motivated you in those early years?

SH: No, my woodshop teacher didn't even know what rosewood was. I was just kind of winging it. I bought a book called Guitar Construction by Erving Sloan, showed how to make classical guitars. I moved up to Moonstone Heights, right on the coast. Up in the woods, I lived in an old Silverstreak trailer by a off-set saw shingle mill. I rented that place and built my first ten acoustics up there. It was kind of in the commune scene. I had a lot of hippie-type friends living in the woods. I had a friend who lived in a Redwood stump.

GC: According to your bio, you pioneered the use of certain kinds of woods indigenous to the pacific coast. What made you break from the norms of the time and move and take new directions with your materials?

SH: I was the first one to bring quilted maple to a NAMM show! There's a picture of me holding the m80 at the 1980 NAMM show on my site. A lot of the Western Big Leaf Maple is grown out here in Oregon and Washington. A lot of them have burls on the bottom, so I started buying a lot of the burls around here. I went up to Oregon and found a lumber yard that had this lumber that was quilted. They were pulling all the quilt boards out. I bought a unit of it and I had ten twelve foot boards with different degrees of quilting. Nowadays people are selling billets for several hundred dollars apiece. Up in my shop, I have a collection of billets that I've had for quite some time. Sometimes I'll buy pieces I see online. Back then, some of that lumber was being used for furniture or other items, just random things. Luthiers hadn't caught on to it yet. Then I was featured in Guitar Player Magazine with a picture of this guitar I had built with enormous, sausage quilt maple and people started to take note. I put that quilt on my first brochures, and everybody wanted that level of quilt. I should have photographed some mediocre stuff!

GC: In the guitar building community, there is often disagreement over the credits of doing things by hand versus using power tools, or even CNC machining. Where do you fall on that spectrum?

SH: Everything here is done by hand. I don't have a numerical cutter. I have a four spindle carving machine, but it's manually operated. I have to push the thing around for carving archtops. It would either carve two, or carve four at a time. It has counter-rotating bits to balance the torque; right hand cutters and left hand cutters. I bought it from Oasis Guitars, kind of an offshoot of Alembic, when they were going out of business. You know, CNC does very precise, very accurate work. I'm interested in CNCs but I don't do enough volume to be putting out numbers like that. I'd also have to spend a year or two learning to use it.

GC: You offer just about any configuration of acoustic guitar. Short scale, long scale, Venetian cut, baritone. What makes you decide which way you want to go on a particular model?

SH: I have two different baritone models right now. One is the B-95, a 30 inch long scale, 20 inch lower bout, it's big. It's the biggest that I know of. It really puts out a body feeling when you play it; it vibrates through your body. Then I've got another one that's 17 inch 28.5 scale. I've also made baritone electrics like the Vulcan 28.5 scale electric baritone. It goes back to wanting that acoustic bass before I even started building. I make a bass loud enough to hold down the low end playing with two guitars without amplification.

GC: What about bindings, inlays, and hardware? How do you source them? What's important to you when deciding which materials to use?

SH: First of all, if it's the customer and they're ordering something, can they afford the amount of abalone I'm putting on it? My designs are all original, hand-drawn designs that I do. It's all hand cut. I've used Zipflex for the inside of the bindings. I like wood bindings, but they are harder than plastic bindings to glue on. But it's all about how precise you route the ledges. I measure everything with veneer calipers to the thousandths of an inch. My eyeballs have been trained through all the years of sizing these things up. I can look at the distance of the E string over the first fret and guess that it's .0025" and have someone measure it and it is. It just normal for me now to measure stuff like that; I'm a perfectionist like that.

Back when I was in limited production, At one point I was ordering Grovers by the gross. But I was having trouble with some of them being bad, so I started using Ibanez tuners for a little while with a

little tensioner on the side. Then I went to Schallers, which were a little more expensive. Then the very first Spertzel machines, I still have some of those very old ones. Bob Spertzel used to work for Grover. I met him at a NAMM show and had him set me up when he was just starting out. Now I'm using these Spertzel open backs. You have to custom order those, but they're super light. I started using Leo Kwan bridges for basses and guitars. I also started off with Bartolini when he was starting out. I was using his pickups before they were called Bartolini, they were called High-A. They're hexaphonic and quadraphonic bass pickups. I used them for the longest time, up to the mid to late 90s. Then they started to be harder to get, so I started using some other pickups. Lately I've been using a guy who winds pickups locally. He'll wind anything you want. I have him wind extra hot PAFs for me and use wider poles on the bridge pickups so the strings are right over the poles, 2 mm spread.

As far as finishes I was using nitro, and then I went to catalyzed urethane, then polyester. I had a vented hood that I'd wear, a fresh air hood that had a computer fan in there and a heater hose. I was spraying real caustic stuff. Now I'm mainly using the KTM9 waterborne, I kind of like that. The thing about it is you can spray it on. You have to lay it on as light as you can, but within a couple hours you can dry sand it. Then you can recoat and the next day you can sand it and buff it. That's how quick. There isn't any shrinkage, really. It has solids floating around in the water matrix and when they come together like that it becomes waterproof. It's a high-tech finish. It's kind of expensive, but it can also be repaired with super glue. It's also very clear compared to some of the nitro I was using. I cut it with some thinner and anti-swirl stuff and found out that it was the lacquer thinner I was using that making my nitro cloud up. Finishing is the other half of guitar building; you have to do a good finish.

GC: What is your creative process? How do you pull it all together from an artistic, as well as functional perspective?

SH: I get the idea to design a guitar. For me, I draw it out full scale on paper. Everything is on a center line. Then I start designing the body and head shapes and look at it for a day or two and not really confirm it till I'm really satisfied with it. Like designing my j90 jumbo, everybody's got a jumbo or a small jumbo, and I changed the design on one of my j90, I made a smaller upper bout. So I redesigned that, and made it an even more refined shape. That's how I got my j97 jumbo. Everything you make has to have a name, you know. Back when, I named the Vulcan. That came from Star Trek. I didn't copyright those names. Guild came out with an m80 after I already had an m80. Theirs didn't go very far, and neither did mine. I did copyright my logo, my name. As far as patenting things, it takes money.

GC: You said on your interview for CBS a few years back, "I can't make an inexpensive guitar." What did you mean by that?

SH: That's trying to compete with CNC machinery and stuff that's made offshore. When it's handmade it costs. You don't have the ways to cut corners. I didn't want to get into making a large number of crappy guitars. I wanted to keep the quality up. I had a bunch of dealers I was working with, but decided that if they didn't sell enough it was like I was paying them to take my merchandise. So I started selling direct. Morley picked me up for a while and I was selling a Vulcan for $1895, which back then was pretty expensive. They were buying all that I could make for a while, and then it slowed down, so I decided to go with the direct dealers. I was doing all the sales work myself till I hired a sales guy who would do a lot of the phone work and talking to dealers. Eventually I got about a dozen employees that would basically build my guitars to spec under my supervision. I would do most of the inlay work. So I was up in the office doing sales. I wanted to be building, so I didn't stick with that.

GC: Looking back over the years, what changes have you seen in the industry? What lessons have you learned?

SH: I've seen a lot of the China guitars getting better quality. It used to be Japanese guitars, then Korean, and now Chinese. The stuff that a lot of people are contracting to have made over there are not half bad. The labor is cheap and they have a lot of machinery and people. The Breedloves that are coming out of China are pretty good.

GC: What are your current projects?

SH: I just finished a double neck for a cardiologist in Alabama. It's in Birdseye Maple. It's a redesigned double neck. I have a j99 double neck that I made for myself. I saw that Ritchie Sambora had a double neck and thought, well I'm going to make one for myself, and I did. Mine is made out of Brazilian Rosewood. This guy kept contacting me and asking questions about a twin neck, and I finally got a deposit. I said, I'll redesign, get a little smaller body and get the necks a little further apart. I had things I wanted to improve on, which I did. He wanted a cutaway between the necks so he could still bar the twelve string neck at the twelfth fret, so I did that. I took one of my old molds and re-configured it to be a double neck mold. This one, the whole build is on my Facebook page from raw lumber to finished product. You can get a lot of different tones and sympathetics out of those twin necks. I built that in about a month and a half. Sometimes I work on two or three instruments, but for the double neck I just worked on that one.

I have since just finished a new personal J-97 doubleneck out of premium quartersawn Brazilian Rosewood with Port Orford yellow cedar top. Its a 12/6, both necks slotheads making stringing and tuning necks easier. It's awesome!

Last year, I built a fully hollowbody Vulcan. I was going to build one for myself. I decided to stain this one purple.Right after staining, I learned of Prince's death. Cosmic. I built Prince a guitar back in 1981, the first Z-80. The sound ports were in the cutaways. Prince's corporation contacted me and asked, "What are you building latley?" They're really interested in what I have. I said I was building this model I just designed that has the sound ports in the cutaways, no F-holes, and the top floats over a baffle system like the voice in the theater speaker cones so all the sound is going straight down the neck. It's capable of being like a parabolic mike. If I turn the sound holes towards the speaker, it will overdrive the note. I shipped it to Prince in 1981.

Then I built another that was purchased by J.J. Cale. He was touring Eureka. I went to a show he played locally, and he came over the next day and parked his bus outside my shop. He bought my other Z-80. I stayed in touch with him and he came up to my shop and he bought my personal J-90 Brazilian Rose. I also built him a banjo neck and two Moonelectros, kind of like Danelectros: piezo bridge and two lipsticks. There's a picture of it in the cover of Road to Escondito. So, I built him one out of quilted Bubinga and another out of Brazilian Rosewood. He showed some these to Eric Clapton, but Clapton only plays Martins, Gibsons, and Fenders, so I didn't bug him.

GC: Do you have plans for the future? Anything new you're looking to try?

SH: I'm possibly going to design a new acoustic bass. I've always wanted to trim it down but have the same volume. I've been into hollow body electrics lately, like the hollow body Vulcan. I've been doing the m80's for quite a while. Doing those tight bends, like the Venetian cutaways and quilted maple is really pull-your-hair-out difficult.In the 80's, I actually welded up my own steam chamber. I put the long sidewoods in the steam chamber and you have about ten seconds to pull it out and set it in a mold before it cools. So you have gloves on, usually it's a two-man operation, one guy holding the mold and me slapping it in there. Latley, I've started doing Florentine cutaways because you don't have to go through that really tight upper corner bend that is really difficult to do without breaking.

I've also been thinking about designing a device that would connect to a sound post, so I could deaden the amount of feedback coming out. I haven't designed it yet, it's just an idea. A lot of guys really like the feedback, but sometimes it's too much. Maybe something like having a block in there, then you could retract it. I'm going to experiment on some of my personal guitars here. I've got a guy that wants a block and a hollow body, that's why I'm driven to do that.

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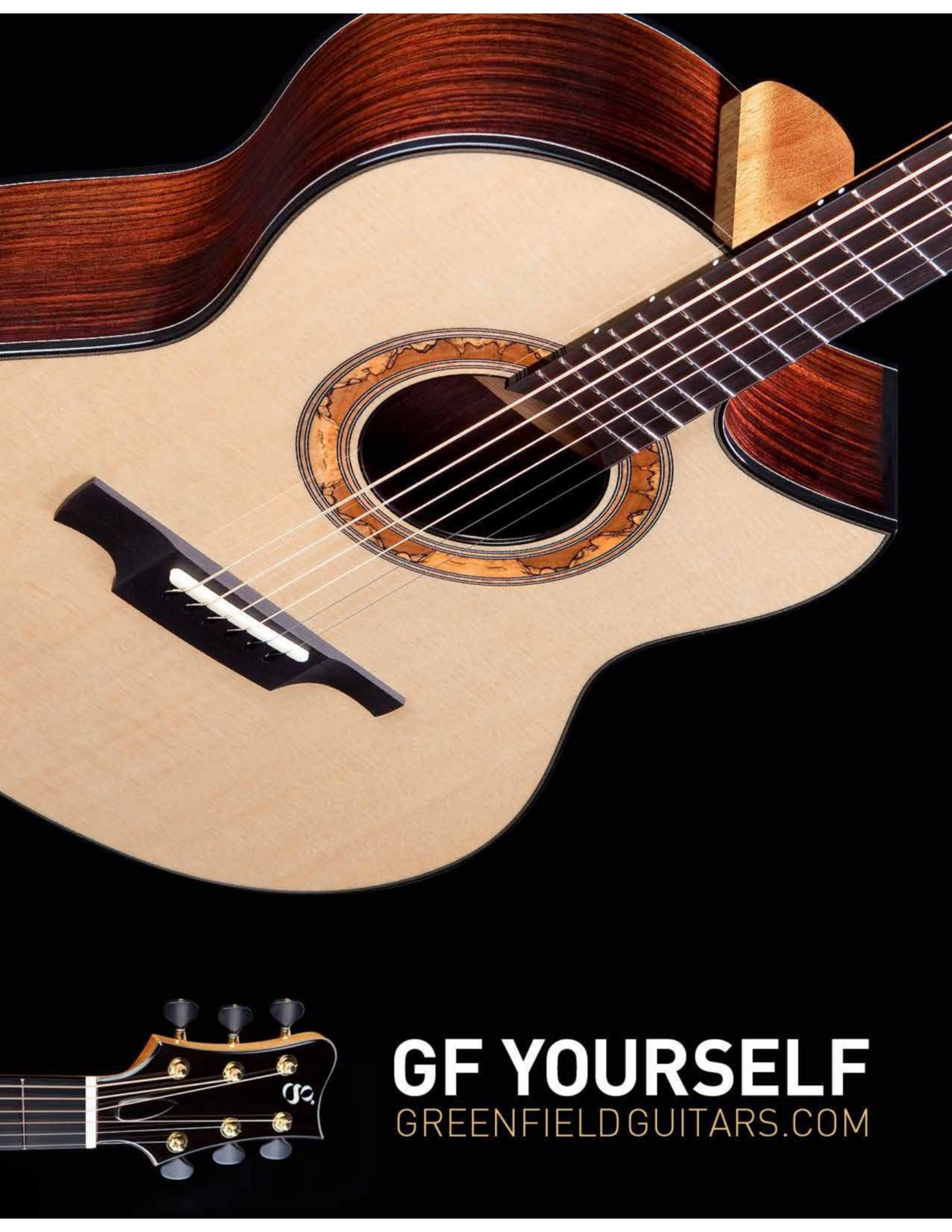
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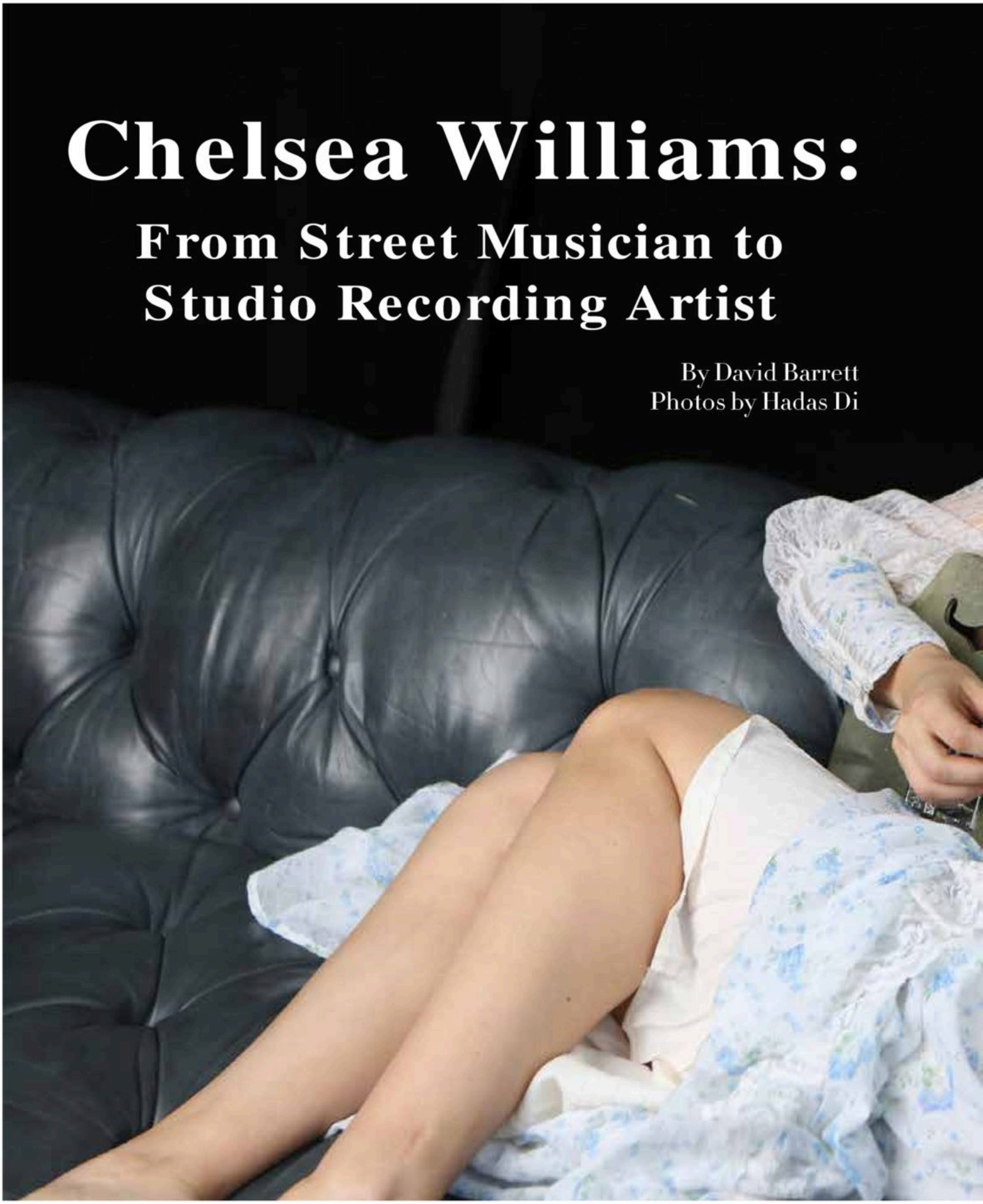
Chelsea Williams:

From Street Musician to Studio Recording Artist

By David Barrett
Photos by Hadas Di



Digging in her heels and staying true to her artistic vision: Chelsea Williams bounces back with Boomerang.

Chelsea Williams was born in Ohio and relocated to California at a young age. She's accomplished more in the last few years than most musicians do in a lifetime, by being a permanent fixture on the Santa Monica Third Street Promenade and independently selling and unheard of amount of CDs by today's standards. Chelsea's garnered the attention of some huge names in Hollywood with her compelling voice and creative musicality. Chelsea talks about her quest to dig deeper and develop her own unique voice.

Guitar Connoisseur: It's awesome to grow up with access to your parent's record collection, can you talk about your earliest influences and why you were drawn to Bob Dylan?

Chelsea Williams: I did listen to a lot of Bob Dylan growing up (and still do). The funny thing is, my mom was a singer/vocal coach and couldn't stand his voice so she never had any of his records around. Listening to Bob Dylan became a bit of a rebellious act for me. I remember watching Martin Scorsese's "No Direction Home" and just falling in love with the irreverent humor in Dylan's songs and in his interviews from that time. I remember thinking, this guy is a true artist. He seemed to live and breath his poetry.

GC: Selling 100 000 units of anything isn't easy these days with digital music and online streaming, could you give us some insight into this amazing accomplishment?

CW: It's definitely weird to think about getting that many discs out there into the world. I don't have any children but it makes me feel a regular Aston "Family Man" Barrett or something. When I first started playing music on the streets and selling CDs out there 10 years ago, it never crossed my mind that it might turn into my full-time job. I was just a kid looking for some attention and maybe a little pocket change. But it became so much more than that for me, from a source of income to a form of therapy... playing the streets has gotten me booked playing in Barcelona, Spain and singing a duet with Adam Levine. I think if you do anything religiously for 20-30 hours a week, you're bound to see some results.

GC: Tell us about the shows at Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade?

CW: There was actually a bit of a learning curve just getting my set up together. There's no power source out there, so I ended up putting together a car battery and power inverter to get enough power for my PA system. I much prefer the sound quality of a two speaker PA system to a small battery powered amp. Plus, with my PA system, I get more inputs so I can use my Log Jammer porch stomper and bring along my guitar pedal board to fill out my sound. Even after playing there for over 10 years... I still get a little nervous every time. Every day is different, and every crowd is different. So you never know if it's gonna be the day that the head of Blue Elan Records buys your CD and signs you to a record deal, or if it's the day that someone runs off with your tip jar. But I guess that kind of keeps it exciting.

GC: Do you have any more insight into playing less conventional venues that are favorable for artists like yourself?

CW: I've played all kinds of unconventional venues. From laundry mats to elevators at the mall, I find it thrilling to surprise people, to kind of shock them into the present moment. And I think there's something about that kind of effect that can be more impactful than if they were to see me play in a more conventional place (say, indoors on an actual stage). There's some kind of magic that comes through the process of unexpected discovery. Although, I am in NO WAY discounting playing actual venues. I think live music in any form is extremely important and could use any and all support it can get these days.

GC: Keeping your integrity and cultivating your original style is essential for emerging artists, what helped you stay on course, and true to your vision?

CW: Over the years, I've definitely had a core group of supporters who have stuck by me. Not only giving me encouragement but also serving up some real talk when I needed it. A couple years back I signed a deal with a major label and did a small EP release with them. The music was much more electronic and pop than my previous recordings and I think it was clear that I didn't have a whole lot to do with the production. During that time I sunk into a bit of depression. I just felt a bit lost. But I was fortunate enough to have several supporters approach me and help to remind me who I really was and help me realize how important it is to stay true

to that. I've since released a new record (Boomerang) on my new label Blue Elan Records and couldn't be happier with the outcome.

GC: Can you talk about any pivotal moments, between your deal with Interscope and recording Boomerang, that contributed to developing and deepening your overall approach to being a singer-songwriter?

CW: I think my experience with Interscope really made me double down on my own artistic perspective in songwriting and production. Going up against such a huge profit-driven machine really made me realize how important and valuable artists are and how necessary creative originality is. I honestly look at it as a basic human need, right up there with food and water.

GC: How has working with a great producer changed you artistically, and do you still like to record and produce yourself using GarageBand?

CW: Working with Ross Garren was absolutely life-changing. He really brought my vision to life and sharpened it along the way. His ears are fantastic. The way he hears chord structures is like 50% Bach and 50% Randy Newman. He can rearrange a song and just make it come to life. Not to mention the fact that he's a bit of a vintage gearhead. So we had a lot of fun playing with Space Echo, tape delay, mellotron and all kinds of goodies that were all new to me. I felt like a kid in a candy store! The experience was definitely a million miles away from recording myself in GarageBand. But GarageBand is still such a great tool for fleshing out production ideas on my own. (although I'll admit, sometimes I miss my old 4 track tape recorder).

GC: Do you use predominantly new Martin acoustic guitars, they record so well and sit in the track so easily, and what about electric guitars and amplifiers, you seem to prefer some of the more retro American sounds?

CW: To be honest, I have pretty much played one guitar for the last 7 years. Whether I'm playing live, or recording in the studio, I use my Martin DC16GTE. I bought it at a small guitar shop in Glendale. I stalked that guitar for weeks before I bought it. I would go in every couple days and compare it to other guitars. I just liked the big beefy bass sound it gets. But yes, there are all kinds of other vintage guitars and gear on my most recent record (Boomerang). Brady Cohan and John Schroeder both played electric guitar. Here are just a few of the guitars/amps they played.

- Mid 60s Fender Jazzmaster
- 2009 American Standard Telecaster with Lollar vintage-voiced Tele pickups
- Eastwood Sidejack Baritone Deluxe
- 1969 Martin 000-18
- Late 70s Takamine 12 string
- 1965 Fender Deluxe Reverb amplifier

GC: Your songs presented on video have an excellent, clean production value, and the vocals sound fantastic, is there a conscious effort to produce such immediate, and concise songs?

CW: Thank you! Absolutely yes, 100%. When it comes to recording my vocals and my guitar I feel strongly that they should sound pretty close to what I sound like in person. Maybe I'm just so used to playing live. I've definitely played live a lot more than I've recorded in the studio. But that's always been very important to me.

GC: How was the experience working with Adam Levine, and are there more plans for further collaborations with other musicians?

CW: It was such a surprise getting to sing with Adam Levine. It was one of those magical opportunities that arose from playing Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica. The head of Playing for Change saw me playing out there and approached me on the spot. And the next thing you know I'm singing with Adam Levine in a video on VH1's top 10 video countdown. Unreal!!

GC: You've attracted the attention of some really big names in the entertainment world, such as Sheryl Crow and Ron Howard, what are the most important things that you've learned as you continue to hone your skills and develop your own musical brand?

CW: What I'm focusing on these days is just digging deeper in general. Digging deeper emotionally, digging deeper into new skill sets, new sounds new songs. And most importantly digging deeper into my own unique voice. I think we all have a unique perspective, and a unique set of skills and I can't stress how important I feel it is to share that with the world. I've never valued individuality more than I do now. So, I've been really digging my heels in on that.

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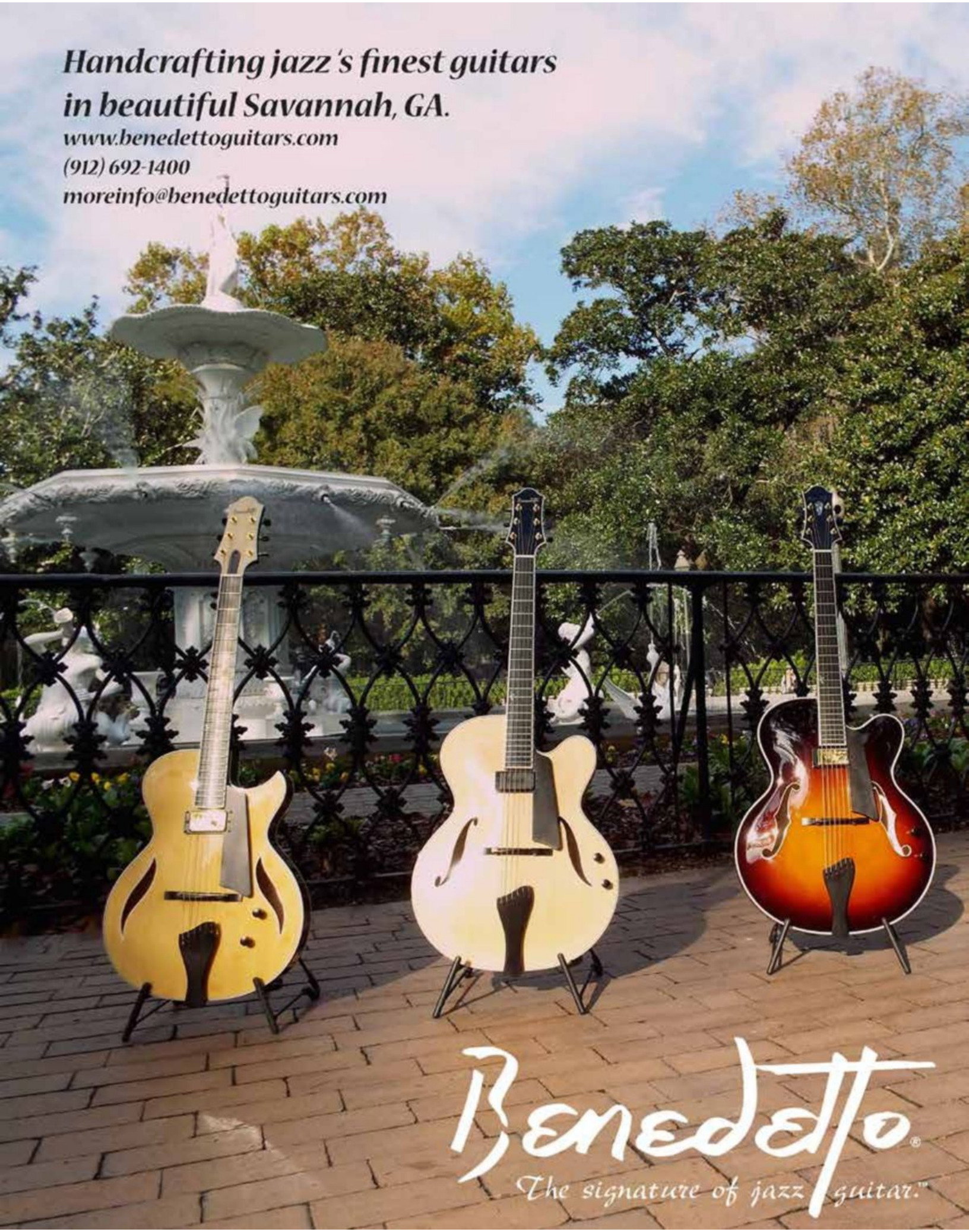
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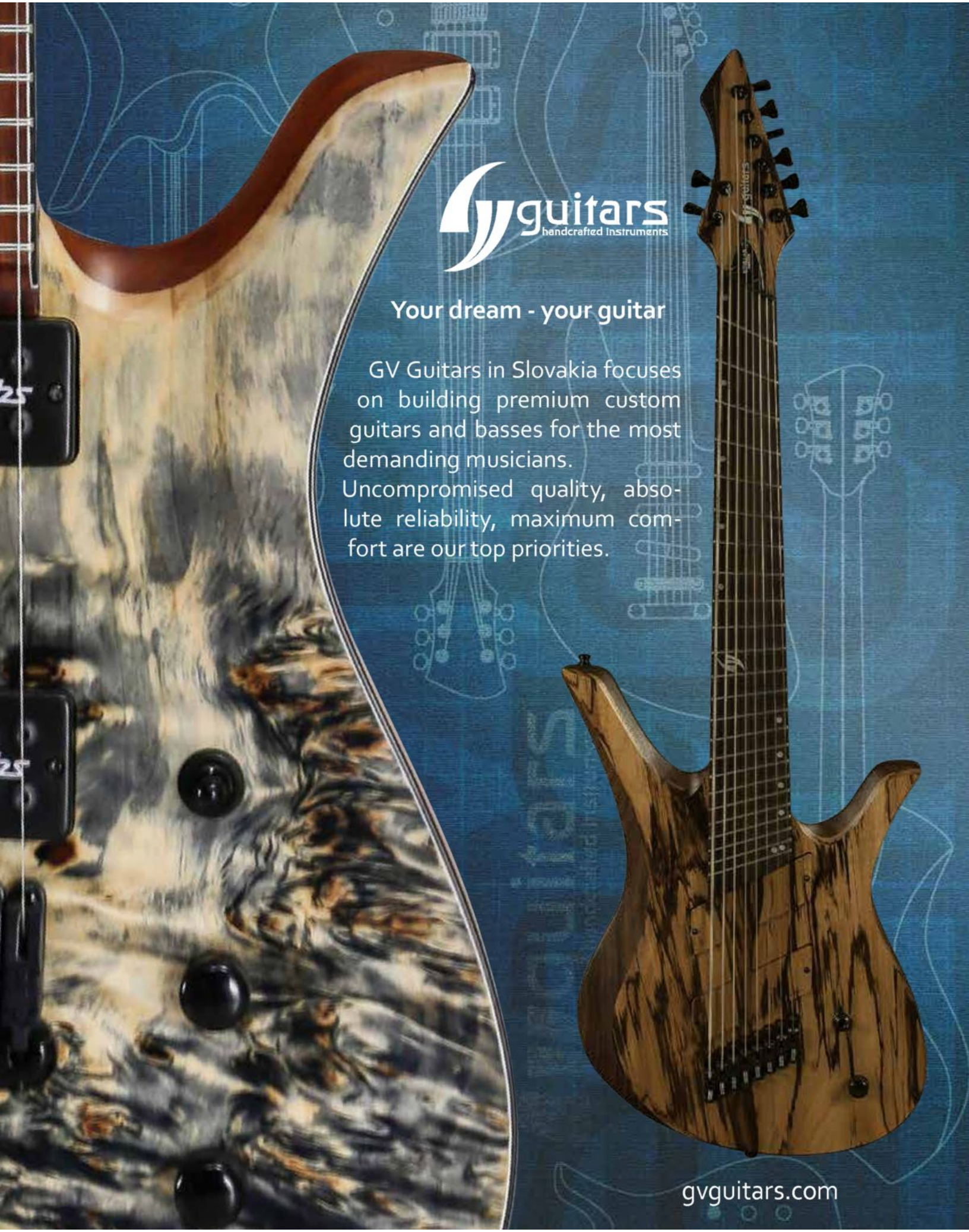
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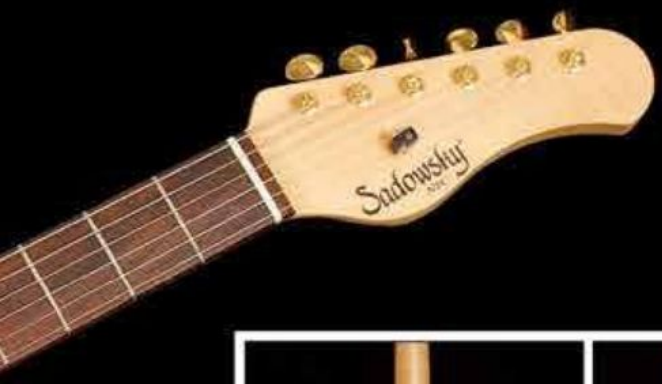
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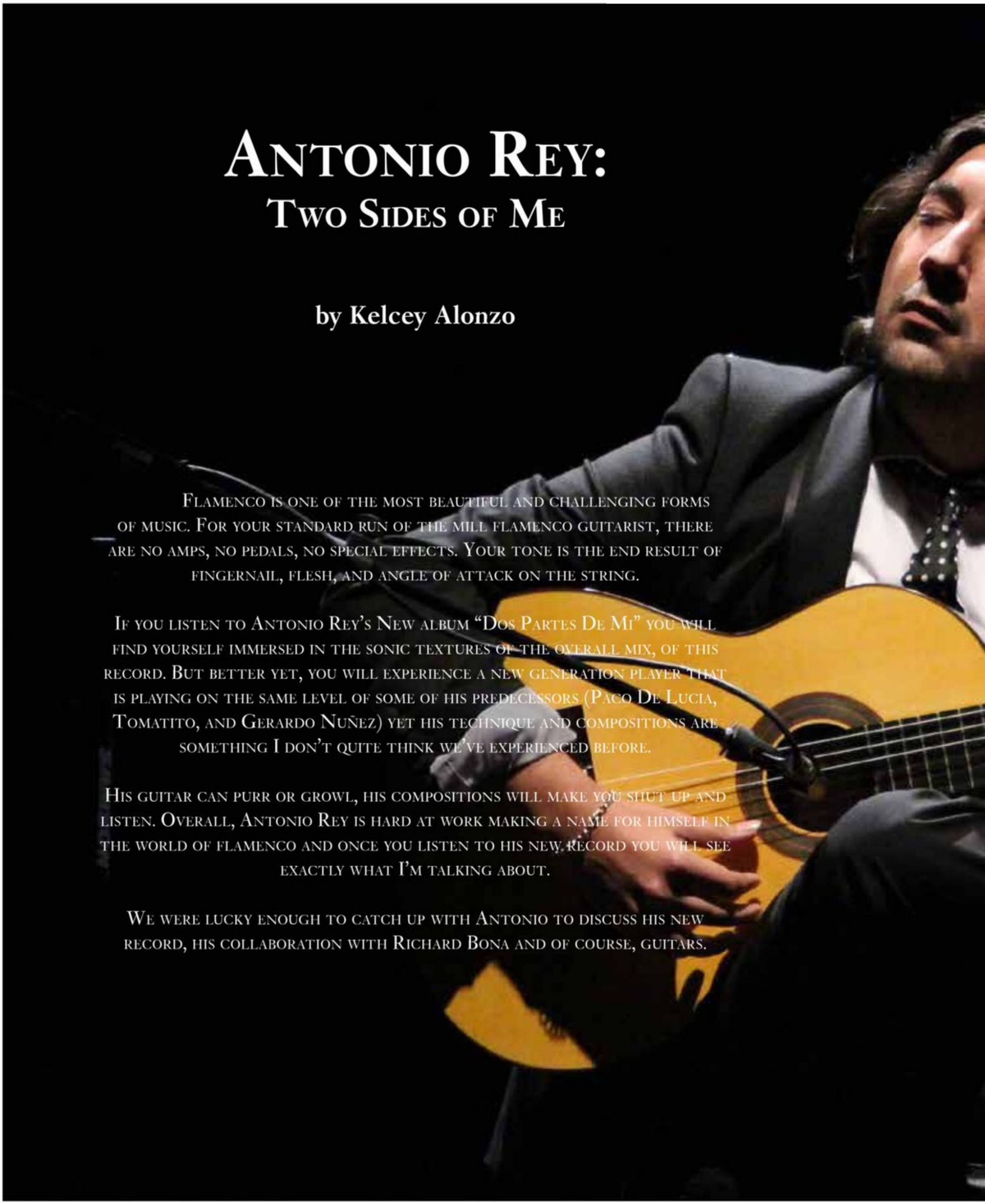
Antonio Rey:
Two Sides of Me

by Kelcey Alonzo



Flamenco is one of the most beautiful and challenging forms of music. For your standard run of the mill flamenco guitarist, there are no amps, no pedals, no special effects. Your tone is the end result of fingernail, flesh, and angle of attack on the string.

If you listen to Antonio Rey's New album "Dos Partes De Mi" you will find yourself immersed in the sonic textures of the overall mix, of this record. But better yet, you will experience a new generation player that is playing on the same level of some of his predecessors (Paco De Lucia, Tomatito, and Gerardo Nuñez) yet his technique and compositions are something I don't quite think we've experienced before.

His guitar can purr or growl, his compositions will make you shut up and listen. Overall, Antonio Rey is hard at work making a name for himself in the world of flamenco and once you listen to his new record you will see exactly what I'm talking about.

We were lucky enough to catch up with Antonio to discuss his new record, his collaboration with Richard Bona and of course, guitars.

Guitar Connoisseur: Thank you for talking to us, I would like to preface my questions by first asking you to describe what Flamenco is in your own words?

Antonio Rey: Flamenco for me is ... it means my life, my day to day, my worries, my stories, my experiences, my way of living day by day, that's flamenco for me.

GC: You come from a musical family, your father Tony Rey is a musician, your sister is a well-respected singer. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood and how music impacted your life?

AR: Yes my father is a singer and guitarist, who taught me, Tony Rey, and my mother is a dancer, my grandfather, my sister, are also dancers ... in short, music has always been the main theme at home since I was young. Typically, the son wants to be what his father is, and because he played in the tablaos (Flamenco Venues), my father used to show me exercises for different techniques, playing in the tablao at night was especially helpful in developing a sense of flamenco singing and dancing.

GC: So, you start playing guitar at the age of 10 and by 18 Antonio Canales is calling for you. I would imagine this is no easy feat. What was your practice routine like during those years and who were some of your instructors?

AR: At 18 I came to Madrid because I was in Japan before Mexico and Madrid and I started playing with professionals like Antonio Canales, Cristóbal Reyes, in mythical and very important tablaos where great artists have performed. That's when I started to take it very seriously. Having to compose music for shows like the company of the New Spanish Ballet, Miguel Ángel Rojo, and Cano Rodríguez. I did shows like Romeo and Juliet, Tierra ... too many to mention. It was very important in my career to be in Madrid.

GC: I remember visiting Málaga in 2006 and thinking I would be greeted by gypsies at the airport. As it turns out, I found there to be a lack of flamenco in the small cafes. Same thing when I visited Madrid. Was I just in the wrong places or is flamenco something that is slowly dying and being replaced by pop music?

AR: Flamenco is not disappearing, what happens is that in Spain there is so much flamenco that what comes from outside is more attractive. I think that the same thing happens in the whole world, but it is not disappearing. There are many tablaos especially in Madrid and Barcelona, the capitals are; First Madrid then Barcelona and Seville too, but places like Málaga, Jaén, Almería, Huelva are cities that are more touristy, so they don't pay so much attention to flamenco, that's why when you were there, there was not so much flamenco, but no, we are not becoming extinct, thank God.

GC: Let's talk guitars for a moment, what are you playing these days?

AR: I play a Manuel Reyes guitar that the Maestro Vicente Amigo gave me, it is one of the most beautiful gifts I've received in my life. It is a cypress guitar with a German Spruce top and a very flamenco sounding guitar, the truth is, its a jewel.

GC: What are some of the characteristics of that instrument that you like and how many guitars do you tour with?

AR: On tour, I usually go with my Reyes and here in the studio, when I record, I also record with the same Reyes Blanca, I do not usually take two or four guitars on tour.

GC: Had you worked with Maestro Gerardo Nuñez prior to him producing your first album "A Través De Ti"?

AR: No, I did not work with Gerardo before! After the album, we made "A Través De Ti" yes, he was the producer. I met him when he was on a jury in a contest here in Jerez de la Frontera, which is the prize of La Peña and Los Cernícalos, at the Bella Marta theater, where I met the maestro.

GC: What kind of influence did he (Gerardo Nuñez) have on you as a composer and guitarist?

AR: I discovered his music when I was 10 years old when my father played the records; "El Gallo Azul" and "Jucal", great works that marked me as a child of Gerardo, and then I was lucky, as I said before to meet him in the contest and he offered me the opportunity to record in his studio "A Través De Ti" that he produced.

GC: Your new album "Dos Partes de mi" is somewhat of a departure from your first album "A Través De Ti" in the sense that the compositions are deeply rooted in flamenco as opposed to your first album which has more of a flamenco/Jazz sound. How much of a role did Maestro Gerardo Nuñez have as a producer in terms of the sound of your first album?

AR: Well to tell you the truth, not much. He would come into the studio alone to review what he did, Gerardo gave me absolute creative freedom to do what came out of my heart, and that was that. He did not influence much in the composition, he would assure me that everything was fine, that it sounded good, that the compositions were in order, that there were no technical, or

tuning issues or mistakes ... the compositions were my criteria.

GC: I love this new record, it sounds really fresh while still giving flamenco lovers the all to familiar flamenco flavor they desire. What was your compositional approach for this new album?

AR: Thank you very much. Well, this new album, "Dos Partes De Mi", is a bit about showing the two parts that I have inside and that I identify with, the first being flamenco, and the other being universal music that I love as well, lots of genres. When it comes to thinking about how the album is going to be, you do not know it until you finish it, I mean, when I start to compose I start looking for the music and then, there's the bulería "Dos Partes de mí", I'm now looking for a soleá that has nothing to do with the previous piece and so on. I do not have a vision of the finished album, I'm composing in my house, in my kitchen, late at night, and when all the pieces fit together I say "This is the sound and focus of this album.

GC: How did the collaboration with Richard Bona come about?

AR: Well, Maestro Richard ... it turns out that his manager here in Spain was a friend of mine and he told me that there was a Cameroonian who was a phenomenon of jazz, who wanted to do a project with flamenco and they called for me for this collaboration.

When I met him and we started playing together, I discovered my hero apart from Paco de Lucia, Richard Bona pegged me as an equal musically. I was fascinated by how a person can release as much music, as he can improvise, play in different tunings, his range as a singer, different rhythms, he's a great teacher, a genius in my opinion. Then the idea of playing on his new record, came up, which is going to be called "Cameroon of the border" so I said to him: "Hey well while this CD comes out why don't you play with me on this bulería ("Dos Partes De Mi") and the Maestro gave me a gift, by agreeing to collaborate, I do not know how to thank him.

GC: What are some of the musical nuances that Richard brought to the title track of this record? And how do you think his playing impacted the overall sound?

AR: I'm tired of listening to myself and when Richard sings it's amazing. The color of the song when he opens his mouth and starts singing, where you forget everything because he has an angelic voice, it's as if the angels of heaven are going down to sing, at least for me anyway. And then his bass playing, Richard is one of the greatest musicians we have on Earth. I also want to add the percussion playing was on that track was also Richard. He is a super complete musician, he plays everything and plays everything well. So to answer your question, What he has most influenced in this tune is the low percussion and voice.

GC: Who are some of the artists you would like to work with, in the future?

AR: It is difficult to choose just one because there are many who I admire ... very many. I was lucky to be with Paco de Lucia and also to play with maestro Vicente Amigo, I would have liked Camarón, but unfortunately, he's no longer with us, but there are many who are alive that I would like, like, Sting or Pat Metheny.

GC: What advice would you give to up and coming musicians who would like a career in music?

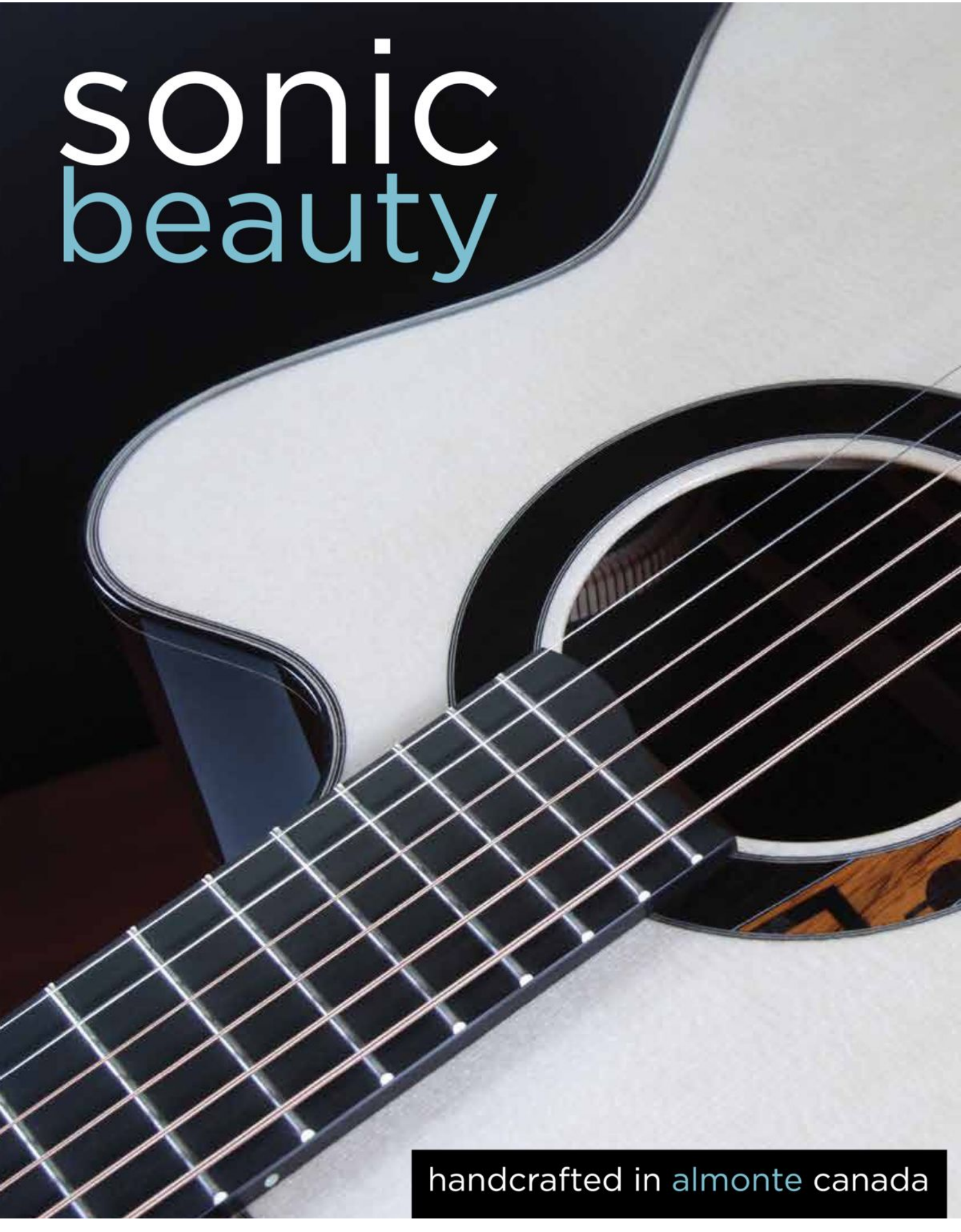
AR: (Laughs) It isn't that easy for one to give advice when one is still learning! But what I have learned in these years is to know what not to do, for example, not to imitate, not believe that your music is worth nothing, not believe that you will not arrive, I mean the opposite; trust in yourself, work hard and dream very hard.

GC: Finally, what are your plans for the rest of 2018 and 2019?

AR: Well for 2018 and 2019 we have great adventures with my manager Debora de Macande and Manuel, we have now the Jerez festival that is one of the most important festivals in flamenco in Spain, then also the Flamenco Biennial in Spain. Lope de Vega theater, the Biennial that has been one of the most important festivals like Jerez for many years, then at the Suma Flamenca a very important festival in Madrid, then the Palau de la Música in Barcelona which is one of the theaters more important and an honor to play there, then this year I'm going on tour in June to Mexico to play at festivals like Monterrey, Saltillo, Querétaro, Durango, Mérida ... and from there we go to the United States, to San Francisco. It is the first time that I go with my music to the United States and then we have a tour in Japan in October and if my memory serves me right, next year projects such as the Fine Arts of the Federal Institute and the year after that start preparing the new projects.

GC: Antonio, I can't tell you what an honor it was to speak to you and would like to thank you for your time. Good luck with the new record and have fun on the road.

AR: Well, thank you very much and a pleasure.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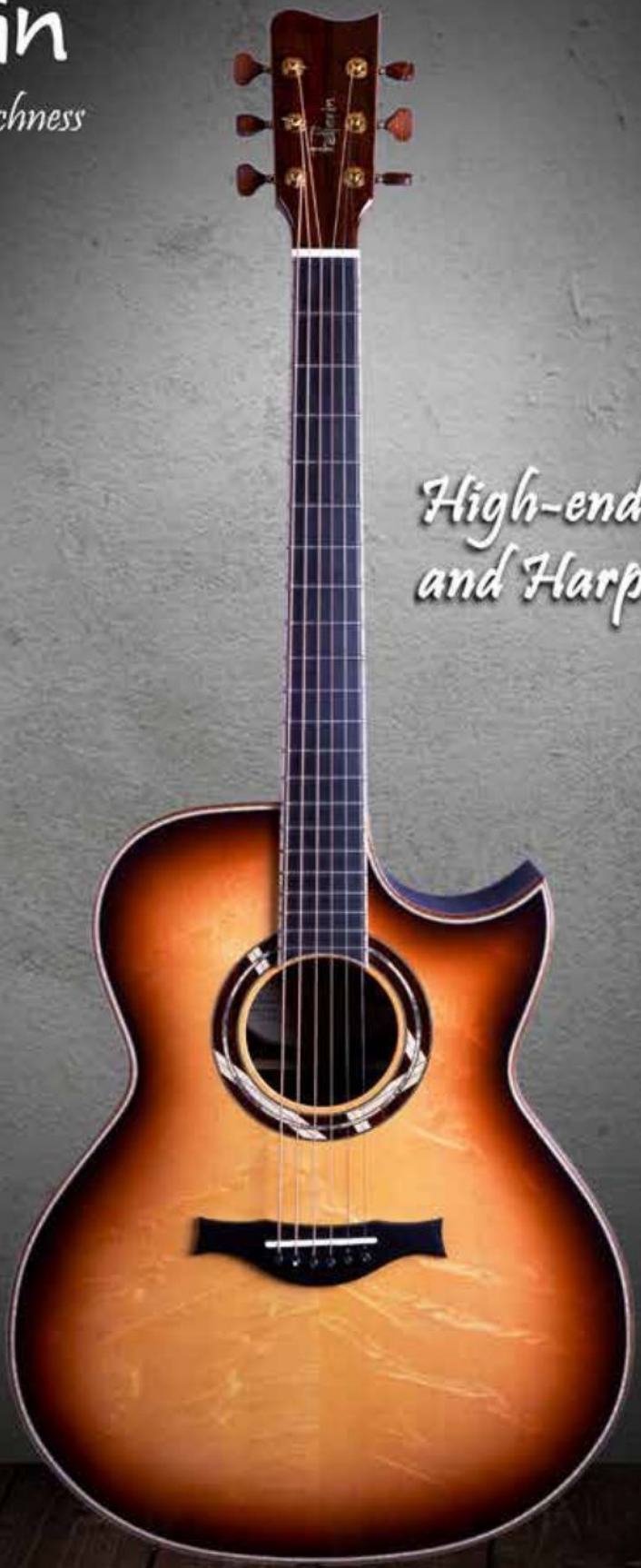

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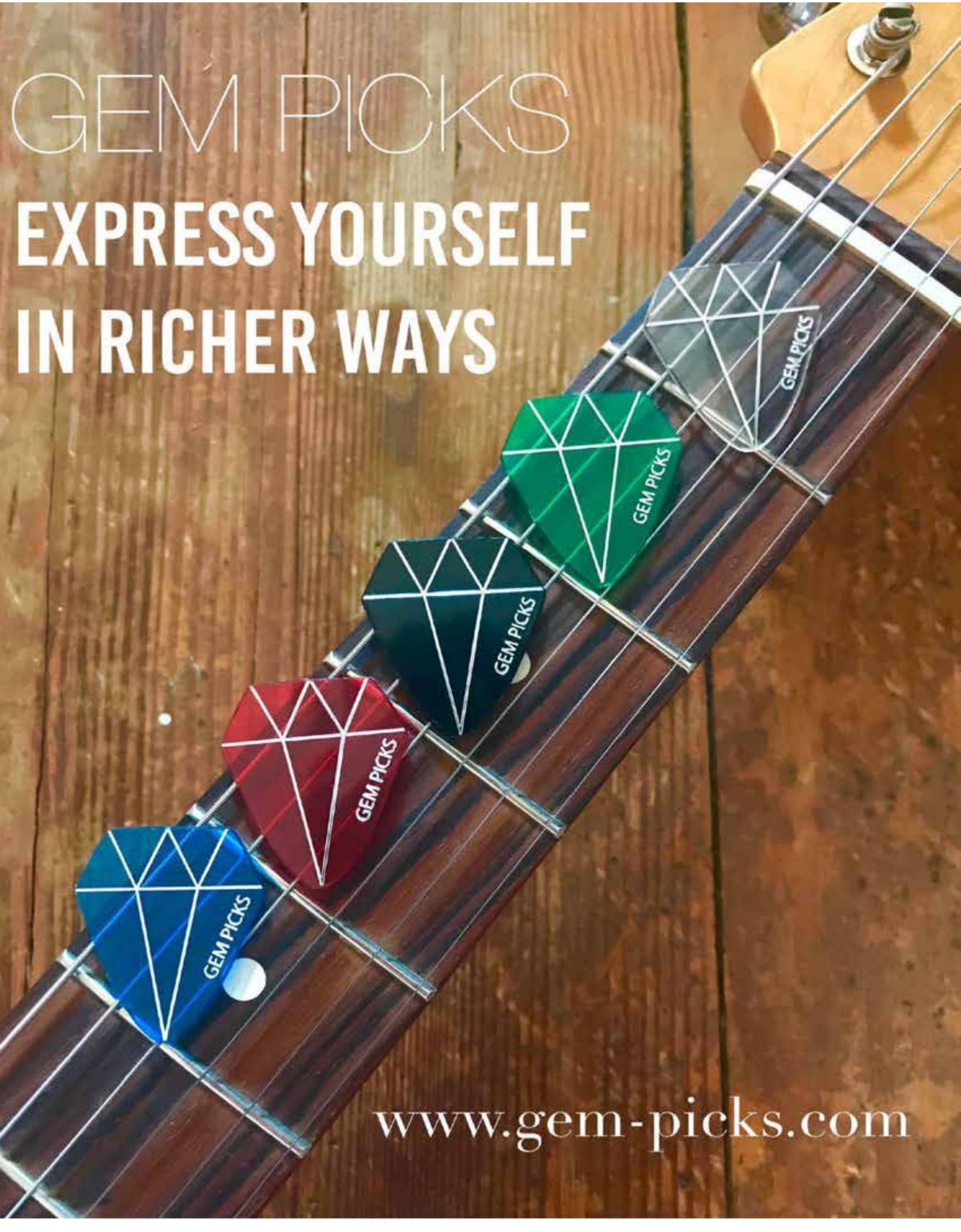
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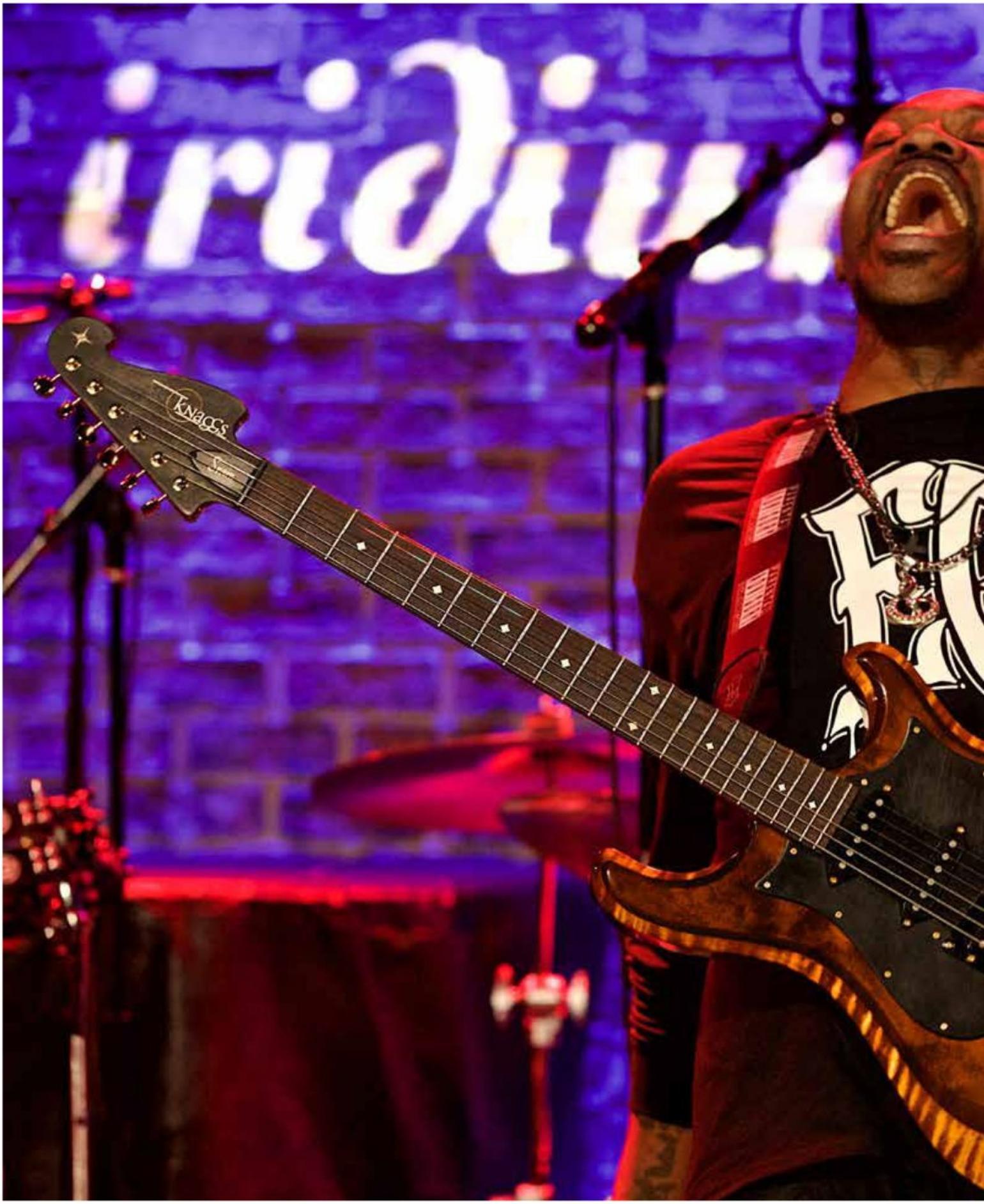
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Gales Force Warning:
Here He Comes...

by Aman Khosla

READ ANY OF MY OTHER PIECES ON GC AND YOU'LL KNOW THAT I USUALLY OPEN WITH SOME SORT OF ELABORATE DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTIST I'M WRITING ABOUT – AND OFTEN END UP STRUGGLING TO REDUCE THEIR ESSENCE INTO A PARAGRAPH OR TWO. I HAVE, AFTER ALL, HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF BEING IN CONVERSATION WITH SOME ICONIC GUITAR PLAYERS, AND IT'S HARD TO CONDENSE SUCH GREAT PEOPLE AND THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS CAREERS INTO A FEW LINES FOR SOMEONE TO SKIM THROUGH QUICKLY BEFORE THEY GET TO THE BIT THEY'RE REALLY LOOKING FOR. BUT HARD ISN'T IMPOSSIBLE, AND I WOULD LIKE TO THINK I'VE MANAGED TO DO A DECENT JOB THUS FAR (LET'S HOPE YOU READERS OUT THERE THINK SO TOO). WELL…ENTER ERIC GALES – AND I'M STUMPED.

IT'S NOT THAT ERIC IS A COMPLICATED GUY, OR THAT HE HAS INDESCRIBABLE QUALITIES – IT'S MORE THAT WHEN HE STARTS PLAYING THE GUITAR YOU FEEL IT IN YOUR BONES, AND THERE ARE NO WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW YOUR BONES FEEL WHEN THIS HAPPENS. TO TELL YOU WHAT I THINK OF ERIC, OR DESCRIBE HIM BASED ON HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AND CAREER, OR EVEN GIVE YOU A NOTE FOR NOTE BREAKDOWN OF A PERFORMANCE OF HIS (THERE WOULD BE A WHOLE LOTTA NOTES TO WRITE ABOUT THERE) – THESE WOULD ALL DILUTE THE ESSENCE THAT MAKES HIM WHO HE IS. THE BEST I CAN DO IS TO TELL YOU THAT WHEN I LISTEN TO HIM PLAY, ALL MY THOUGHTS DISAPPEAR AND I AM FULLY PRESENT TO THE PURITY OF THE MUSIC FLOWING THROUGH HIS SOUL. HE IS NOT WITHOUT INFLUENCE, AND HE MOST CERTAINLY PLAYS THE PART OF A BLUESMAN PRETTY WELL, BUT ERIC HAS A TASTE FOR MUCH, MUCH MORE, AND IS AS AUTHENTIC AS IT GETS.

I WENT TO SEE HIM PLAY AT THE IRIDIUM IN NEW YORK A COUPLE WEEKS AFTER THE INTERVIEW, AND I DECIDED AFTER DOING SO THAT I'D APPROACH THIS PIECE A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY THAN THE REST, OR REALLY ANYTHING ELSE THAT'S BEING WRITTEN OUT THERE. MUCH OF ERIC'S ENERGY CAN ONLY BE EXPERIENCED AT HIS SHOWS, AND I WANTED THAT TO BE A PART OF THIS PIECE. SO, CALL THIS AN INTERVIEW, CALL IT A PART REVIEW OR A COMMENTARY, CALL IT AN OPINION PIECE OR CALL IT A BADLY PUT TOGETHER ARTICLE – ONE THING'S FOR CERTAIN HERE – I WANT YOU TO GO OUT THERE AND CHECK HIM OUT IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY.

Guitar Connoisseur: The man who walked out on that stage at the Iridium on a cold, frosty January night in New York City was equal parts confident and humble, and was overcome with pride, as he should've been. Clear-minded and sober for well past a year for the first time in a couple decades, Eric has journeyed into the abyss and back. I asked him whether he felt that he'd learnt a lot and was better off for it, or if he was just happy he'd survived it all.

Eric Gales: Well, both! Honestly I do think the things I went through have wound up making me a better person. I'm lucky that I did survive – everybody doesn't get the opportunity to live and tell about what they've been through. They're, for one, dead, or living miserably somewhere. And the other thing is, yeah – I think it's a combination of both man, y'know? There was more that needed to be added to my story I guess, and my finding the good side of life and being able to show people that you can make it out is now a part of it. I want people to know that you can make it through and come back stronger than ever.

GC: That's really powerful, and I think you should be proud of what you've accomplished. What was it like to live through all those years, now that you have a clear head?

EG: Man, it was basically the difference between night and day. I was just existing. Fading away, I began to not care about my body, I didn't care about my health. Playing out – if I wound up somewhere and somebody asked me to sit in, then so be it. But it got to the point where I was barely showing up for shows and when I did, I showed up 2-3 hours late as high as I could be. And that was cool to me. It was a whole different mindset, but at one point it was so bad that people would say things like 'this guy is just a waste of a talent'. I recall hearing things like that from people that didn't know I'd heard them talking. People were literally waiting by the phone, at any moment, to hear that I'd passed away and I was cool with that. That's just where my head was – I had become so engrossed with the addiction that it was ridiculous. I would try to justify it as a way to make myself look cool, and it just wasn't, y'know? Going to jail, and that whole lifestyle that I really wasn't born into but wound up getting involved in – I was definitely just in the wrong place, carrying myself through stuff that I think wasn't intended for me to go through. But like I said before, at the end of the day I guess it was – so that my story could be more impactful to someone who will benefit from it. God saw fit to let me survive and not die on one of the many nights that I spent damn near trying. Whether I want to believe it or not, that's what it basically was.

GC: What made you want to do that? Was it circumstantial, or someone you met when you were younger?

EG: The whole street life is what I thought was cool. I glamorized it – it was just dope to me! And I didn't grow up in that, it came a little later on. I was in my mid to late teens and I just got intrigued by it all – trying stuff that I'd never done before and lying, saying that I had – it was crazy. That wasn't even my schtick, but then there I was. And then life really just started kicking my ass, bad – and it did for two decades!

GC: Why stick on for that long? What was the motivation?

EG: Man I have no idea! In my head, my intention was to stick on longer than I did! I was very stubborn, and people would try to tell me 'Eric, you're better than that' and I just didn't want to hear it. I was pushing the throttle – and for 20-something years, I just kept doing it.

GC: What brought you out then?

EG: I guess at some point, finally – enough was enough. A big part of that was my wife who was there for me and she helped me to learn and to help myself out of it. Then it just finally stuck, almost a year and a half ago, and I listened this time. I can't tell you why, but I just listened. In about a week and a half I'll be 18 months clean and sober.

GC: That's incredible man, congratulations!

EG: Man, the moment I made that decision my life just turned all the way around. There was stuff that was just waiting on me to get me together. I realized that there's a lot here that rides on me, on me being okay. I carry a lot of people's livelihoods in my hands – band mates and booking agents and my family, and I really didn't care about any of that for quite a while. My age, my mortality or any of that stuff wasn't a factor – I was actually totally content with dying as high as I could, so that wasn't it. It was just something, and I finally said 'I gotta go do something' y'know? I gotta go do something. Just reflecting on it all now – I was just existing with all these crazy ups and downs. I did 3 years in prison, and that was a direct product of how I was living – that wouldn't have happened if I wasn't pining after that life!

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There's also no telling what sort of rise to higher fame I could've achieved if not for all of this, but however life takes its turn is how it took its turn and I think it happened because it's supposed to happen. Now that I've survived, there's no way anyone can say 'this dude lived his life in vain', because I've made it to the other side. If I died in the process that would've been the so-called regret, but there's none of that now, because my story is hopefully the perfect picture for someone else to look at and be inspired by.

GC: I'd heard you turned yourself into prison – that's a bold move!

EG: I did turn myself in, I did! I turned myself in to do 3 years – I had to. I didn't want to live on the run, and I guess that might've been the start of this whole journey out of my situation. It didn't stop my using dope at the time, but having some kind of permanent record – it wasn't going to work for me to try to tour and have an open warrant out. I wanted to get that off my chest and I guess if I were to be proud of anything that I did myself, it's that I did that. Prior to doing so, the judge had given me ample amounts of probation time that I'd violated continuously and y'know, I wasn't acting right! So I thought I'd get it off my chest and move on.

GC: Yeah, maybe that planted a seed that your wife helped you nurture later on! Did you have time to reflect while in prison?

EG: Oh man! You think of being in prison and it's just as you'd imagine. Nobody wants to be there – and you have nothing but time to reflect. You do your time and pray that the day you get out comes sooner than later.

GC: Does all of this give you perspective on, beyond your life, your career and what it takes to do well in this industry? What do you feel like you've missed out on while you were down and out?

EG: Man, I honestly think that once you have the drive and a passion for something that you believe in, it's about staying focused and pushing through it – good or bad. Somebody's going to take wind of it. Some may not but you don't let that be a deterrent, you just keep going. And all those opportunities that have been missed and have gone by the wayside – if they're meant to come back full circle they will. The fire will catch on eventually as long as you keep on that path, keep your engine running and in pristine condition – you know what I'm talking about? I've learnt that it's about keeping me right with all the necessary oil changes and a proper tune up and all that sort of stuff. If you go on and don't take care of it properly it tends to run poorly and eventually break down. So if I keep the engine in pristine condition, then it's not a concern of mine if people catch on. It's when.

GC: Your story is inspiring and you've learnt some things along the way that, I think, will leave you much better off. And I think your music will be better of for it too.

EG: Oh, absolutely! Yes, absolutely. Since I've gone clean it's been stratospheric all the way into parts unknown. It's ridiculous.

Ridiculous it was – Eric came out onto that stage with blistering force, baring his soul for the entire room to see and feel. He is an intensely emotional musician and his material ranges from beautiful and articulate to really ballsy and rocking. What was most evident at this show though, was that his mind is now crystal clear. Eric is constantly reading the room and working his act, and has built a well thought out, coherent set. I asked him about his latest record 'Middle of the Road' and what he felt was different about making this one.

EG: Well – one thing is that I came into with a clean head. Getting sober was the main thing here and I just dove in and wrote all about my life. The pre-production and gathering of the songs was done earlier last year and by the time we came in to record it, it all just started coming out. By the end of it, I'd collab'd with some great people and wound up being able to tell my story, about the journey that I've been through.

GC: Yeah, I can hear that. There's a clear thread you can follow through the record and your stories are powerful because they're so genuine. How did collaborating work for you on this one? You had your brother Eugene on for a ripping solo at one point too, right?

EG: Yeah, he collab'd on a song or two. I got him to guest appear and y'know – I just dove back to some of the roots and incorporated some of the elements that I knew I had a strong foundation with. I had Raphael (Saadiq) on and I called Lauryn Hill in on a song, and everybody's parts were instrumental in making it happen. The rest was me just giving it what I had to bring it to fruition and I think it turned out fantastic. All the pieces fit in the puzzle very well.

GC: Do you feel a pull back towards your roots, especially now that you're clean and sober? That tends to happen a lot of times, because your foundation is really where you can build back up from.

EG: Well at the foundational level, yeah – I don't think my roots ever went anywhere. But I think it's more about expanding in the other direction, to be honest with you. I am highly influenced by different styles of music, and that was one of my goals with this record – to give people as many different spices as I could. I wanted to let inspiration pass through me and showcase some of the stuff that I like and I'm influenced by – give you my interpretation of all these different styles and how they affect me. There was no real heavy forethought about it or anything though – it just came as it went along and unfolded into what it now is.

GC: What are you listening to these days that's inspiring you then?

EG: Well I'm listening to a lot of RnB and hip-hop nowadays, actually. I've always been drawn to that, but that doesn't really factor in very much with the stuff I write.

GC:That's interesting. I guess it's actually a pretty common phenomenon – I remember being perplexed when I was a kid when I'd read interviews and find out what some of my favorite rock musicians were listening to, and it was all this bizarre stuff that had nothing to do with the music they made. And then as I made more and more music myself I started to realize that's what I was doing too! Sometimes I think genre can be a really restrictive, limiting word. What's your take on that?

EG: Well I am grounded in the blues-rock category, but there are so many other facets to what I do! So for me, I just think that it's music. We have categories – for what purpose? I don't know. There's so much music out there that it should all just be music.

GC: Sure! Then do you ever feel like you've been pigeon-holed into that blues-rock thing?

EG: Not necessarily – even when that is the case I know at the core what I am, and if you come to a live show you're going to hear a combination of a whole lotta stuff. So at least for myself, I'm very comfortable with where I am. If I were to be restrained to just one particular style I would be miserable. All that variation jumps out like a jack-in-the-box pretty sporadically during the show and wherever it goes, that's where my vibe is at.

GC: To me it feels like the common thread is inspiration. You're going wherever you're inspired.

EG: That's it man – that's the perfect description.

GC: Well, do you know what it is

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that inspires you?

EG: All kinds of things! Predominantly the driving force is other music – other players, and all the various live situations I'm in. It's also the stuff that I think about in a major way – situations I've been through that I know I shouldn't have made it through, and there are people that have passed on that I think about every time I'm on stage. Whatever it is though, the inspiration always shows up in some kinda way, y'know? The passion and the energy and the emotion is a bundle that comes with who I am, and when that unleashes itself you better just stand back and watch, because it's happenin'!

And man does it happen. Eric's first couple songs went really well – no warming up to the crowd or the stage necessary he was straight into it, both guitar and vocals on point. And just when you start to think to yourself 'this guy's really good', his next solo almost explodes out of him and takes the lower half of your jaw along for the ride. There's usually a turning point when Eric goes from being 'really good' to 'Eric Gales' – you know he's there when he solos hard enough that his hat falls off.

And Eric Gales doesn't make mistakes. It has nothing to do with his being 'better' than anyone else, his unique style or even his skill or talent – it's just that his sense of expression is so incredibly pure and authentic that he speaks through it effortlessly. To me, Eric Gales just is music, and that's what makes him special.

GC: Growing up in a musical family do you feel it's natural for you to express through music so freely?

EG: Yeah! I guess I'm conditioned, or I worked my way into that. I grew up in a gospel household, and my mother and father were deep church people who grew up that way. There's a lot of emotion and expression and passion that comes in through the types of churches that we were raised in. That is a strong foundation for me, and where a lot of it comes from, and I'm convinced that's what is riding with me today. The only difference now is that I'm sprinkling spices of other kinds of music on there, but that passion and foundation is still there.

GC: Did you ever shed your vocals like you do your guitar playing?

EG: Well I do! To the extent of the limitations of my voice, but it's the same there too. My focus is definitely more on my guitar playing, but the same emotion and the same passion is in my voice too. It's just another instrument for me, and I treat it the same as I do the guitar.

GC: Well with guitar the other thing is that there is a lot more extra stuff that we get lost in too, y'know? Vocals are what they are, and singing is about getting closer to the truth within – not that the guitar isn't, but there's also this whole side to guitar playing that's all about gear and creating colours. What's going on with you gear-wise?

EG: Well I've actually got this new endorsement with DV Mark amps – my signature amp with them just came out about a month ago. I've still got the Two Rocks and stuff like that, but this new amp is killer! I also just got a Knaggs guitar that I really like a whole lot and I'm breaking in. I've got several different guitars that I'm into though, and my Magneto is my go to. I've got a couple Strats and still have the St Blues, the John Page and a couple Paul Reed Smith guitars – but that Magneto and the Knaggs are what I'm working with right now.

GC: What do you like about the Knaggs? I've never played one but have heard the name around a little more lately.

EG: Man I'm still getting familiar with it myself. It turns up, the volume works, the tone knobs work and that's all I needed to happen right now! It has a great feel to it though, and a nice slim neck which I like. The tone is amazing. I've only had it for about a month so I'm still breaking it in.

GC: It's like getting to know a new person – take a while sometimes!

EG: Right! Right.

GC: Do you like the idea of endorsements?

EG: I just like a lot of different things, so I really don't go exclusive unless I really like something, like the DV Mark amp. That's definitely a great piece of work and worth putting my name on. But with guitars, I don't like going exclusive. There's a reason they made 31 flavours, y'know? I don't want to be constricted and not be able to play something else when I like all! That's just my take on it.

Eric had his crystal clear, crisp and beautiful sounding Magneto out with him for this show. A few songs in, he asked if the audience wanted to hear him mess around with a little blues. I'm sure you can imagine the intensity of the affirmation he received from the crowd – at which point he obliged by bringing his new Knaggs guitar out, and proceeding to do things to that poor guitar that meant he couldn't send it back to its mother without a shower first. He must've broken it in pretty well...

Eric's commitment to music comes from a deep place, and his newfound sense of heightened awareness only adds to the sophistication of his playing and the flow of his performance. He paused for a moment during the show to remember a young man with cancer who had come to his last show in New York, lamenting that he was no longer with us, and paid tribute to him and his father and uncle who were in the audience.

GC: I'm sensing that you think family is an important thing in life?

EG: Well for the longest time, I really didn't. But now later in life, I'm beginning to have that mindset. It's all you've really got at the end of the day! I've got a wife that holds it all in and has made me realize this more and more. These are definitely values that I took for granted and took advantage of for a while, and I lost some people during that time. I haven't, still to this day, properly mourned the loss of my brothers and my mom. But it's always with me, and it comes out through the music – and now I know they're with me and they're proud and they're happy that the youngest in the family finally got it right.

GC: Right on man. You're a good guy and it takes courage to be able to face these hurdles. You worked with your family a bunch too right? I was just actually listening to Left Hand Brand…

EG: Yeah, the Gales Brothers, that's crazy stuff! My family – we were all close, and they were definitely responsible for my makeup and who I am – and that's the undisputed truth right there. I never will lose sight of that, and I think about them all the time. Like I said, it's through my music and performance that I get to show the inspiration and effect that they had on me. Their spirits definitely come out when I play.

GC: Was it a tense time working on that record with

them?

EG: I was doping really hard during that time, and I purposely came around really late at night to do my parts when nobody was around. I was getting really high and I didn't want them to see me doing it. That's how that record was put together, but it's one of the greatest records of all time right there, and it's me and my brothers. If I wasn't so engulfed in the dope, ain't no telling how much further it could've gone.

I look back and beat myself up over opportunities that were missed out on or just thrown by the wayside because of me, or given up out of concern for me, but I have to just look forward to what I'm doing today.

GC: Does this influence how you approach your career?

EG: Absolutely. I'm definitely more aware now. I really didn't care about a lot before – you could get in over me and I wouldn't have said a word. Now, all cylinders are kicking and I'm aware of everything that's going on. My priorities are in the right place, where they should've been all along, and having this opportunity to be living again makes me feel like I can do it all over again the way I want, capitalizing on it all.

GC: Is that what Middle of the Road is about?

EG: Well I just think that's the title that fits the situation best, y'know? I think if you can be perfectly aligned in the middle of the road, you've got almost like an aerial view and you can see to your left and to your right. If you're wavering off into the gravel that's not good, if you're in the median towards one side that's not good, but if you're in the middle of the road – that's good.

Eric Gales stuck to the middle of the road (figuratively) through his entire set. This is not to say that he was 'just good' by any means, and is more so an observation of his character and presence at the show. Calm, controlled, clear and remarkably aware, both of himself and the room around him, Eric put on a mammoth of a show along with his wonderful, talented wife and hard-hitting rhythm section – pounding out the chunkiest of grooves, wailing through soaring solos, dancing through the grooviest of jams and crying with the rest of the room through the most delicate and sensitive moments. Everything Eric does, whether he likes it or not, is authentic and incredibly honest, and at the heart of it lies pure inspiration. I said

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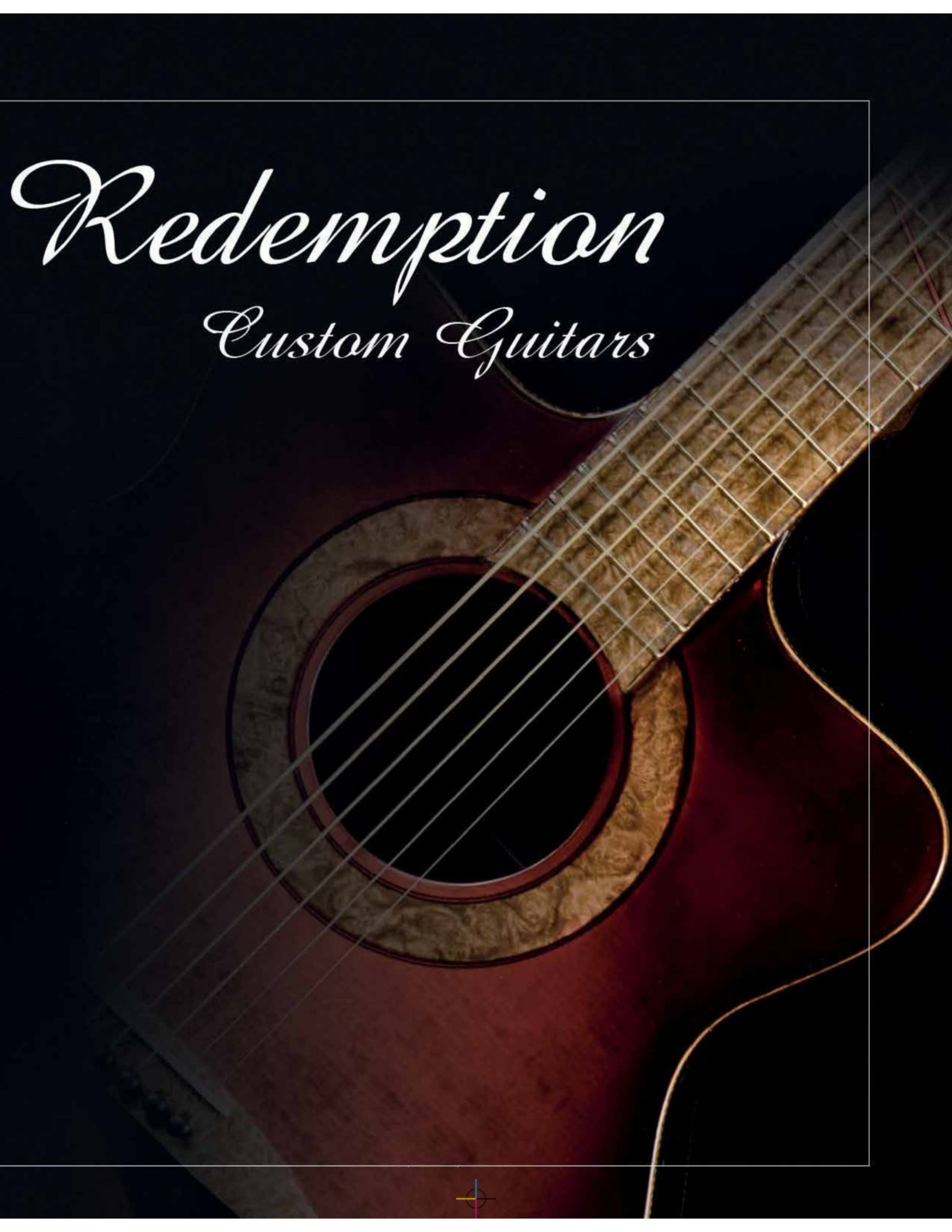

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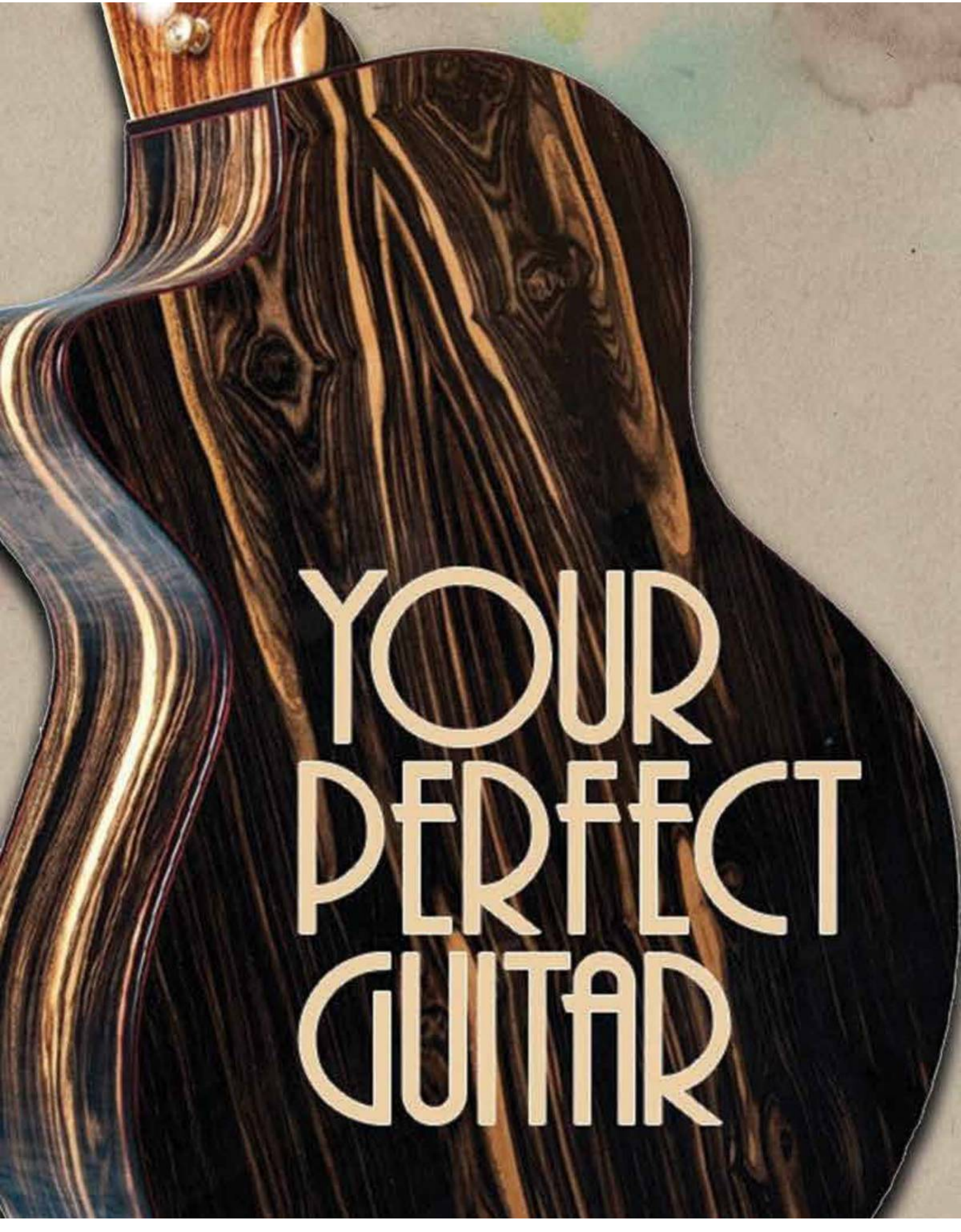
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